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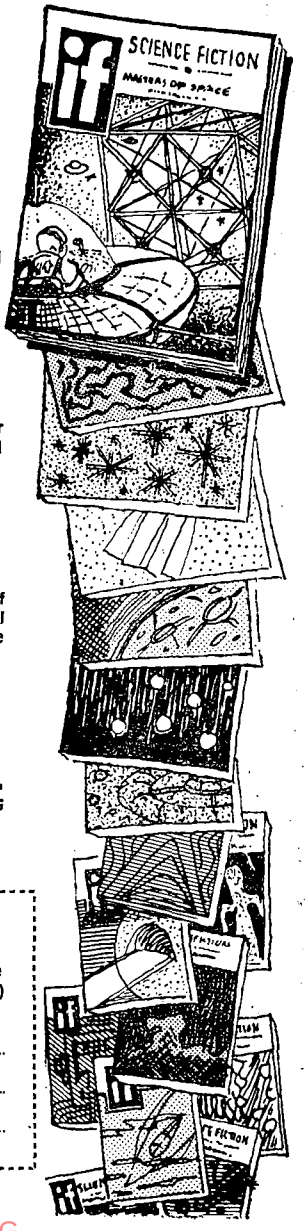

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MAGAZINE

OCTOBER, 1962 • VOL. 21 NO. 1

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Cover by VIRGIL FINLAY from **THE BALLAD OF LOST C'MELL**

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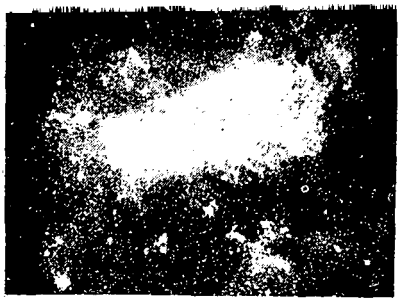

The Large Magellanic Cloud, an irregularly shaped galaxy which is a satellite of our own. The Cloud contains the star S Doradus, some 500,000 times brighter than the Sun, the hottest star known.

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THE BUSINESS OF BEING BAD

ALONG ABOUT now the annual prizes for worthy contributions to science fiction will be awarded. One of them will, as usual, go to somebody for the category called "best dramatic performance on television or motion pictures." If past performance is any criterion, it will go to a television show that about one voter out of four has seen, and fewer than half of those really care for.

The unhappy fact is that for this prize there is very little competition. Science fiction on television is bad enough — if there is an area of TV where Commissioner Minow's term "wasteland" indubitably applies, it is in its science-fiction dramas — and as for good science-fiction movies, there just ain't no sich animal. What was the last good one you saw? Most science-fiction readers have trouble naming anything more recent than *The Forbidden Planet* . . . and that was half a dozen years ago.

Yet there are plenty of science-fiction stories in print that seem admirably adapted to motion pictures. Why in the world doesn't some smart Hollywood producer make a few of them?

THERE ARE answers to that question, and we've gone to some trouble to learn a few of them.

The first answer is a single word: Money.

There are two kinds of motion pictures being made today, the very big ones and the very little. The very big ones represent such a titanic investment of capital and effort that the producers will not bet except on a fixed race. That is why there are

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$25,000,000 remakes of ancient stories; the producers reason that if it made money once it will make money again, and let the other fellow take a chance on something new.

The trouble with that, from our point of view, is that few really big sf movies have ever been made. Thus there isn't much to look for in the way of remakes.

So barring an occasional courageous (and thus, in the judgment of his peers, crazy) experimenter, we can't hope for a great deal in the way of high-budget science-fiction movies. That leaves us the Grade B artists.

To produce a quickie for distribution as the second half of a drive-in's double bill (and ultimate consumption on The Late, Late Show) costs not much more than fifty thousand dollars. Some of them have been made for even less. This is practically petty cash by Hollywood standards (it represents about a week's pay for an Elizabeth Taylor), and to make it possible every cost is pared to the bone. Shooting time is held to a single week. Rehearsals are very few. Costumes are picked up at Army & Navy surplus stores; sets are stark, cheap and flimsy. If something goes wrong in a take it may not even be shot over again. The writer (who is often the producer, as well as the director) hastily tinkers up the script to allow the boner, and shooting goes on.

In spite of all this it is astonishing how competently the actors act, the directors direct, the photographers shoot and the special-effects men create plausible gadgets. These men and women are highly skilled professionals. They do everything they can. What makes the average cheapie as terribly bad as it is is not the low cost of its production. The trouble is that whatever money does get spent is spent on the wrong story.

Ten years or so ago — in the remote Eocene of television — we were privileged to sit in on some of the science-fiction programs of that era, Captain Video, Tales of Tomorrow and a couple of others. The average budget of these enterprises was a closely guarded secret, but it was at least an order of magnitude smaller than today's cheapest motion picture. The principal staple of scenery was painted canvas. Stone walls rippled to the touch. Ten dollars' worth of electrical parts had to do as a $50,000,000 synchrotron.

Yet there was hardly one of those old TV programs that was not better than most of the low-budget motion pictures of today!

The reason they were good is

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that the producers had the wit to make an unusual decision. When they wanted science-fiction stories written they took their courage in their hands and employed science-fiction writers write them.

Often it was the science-fiction writers themselves — Sheckley, Sturgeon, Kornbluth and many others — who prepared the actual shooting script. When the producers could not do that, they employed other script writers, but took the trouble to have them understand what the original story was all about and to convert that story to dramatic presentation . . . instead of the present custom of throwing everything but the name of one character out of the window and remaking Buck Rogers.

IT'S TRUE that science-fiction stories often rely on rather sophisticated ideas — "sophisticated" in the sense that they are developed from previous ideas— and it is not always easy to get everything possible out of them unless the audience has had some background in the field.

It does not, however, follow from that that the only way to handle science fiction is to extract its ideas and destroy them.

Even if some nuances are missed by the non-specialist public, there's plenty left to provide entertainment and pleasure. There are dozens of good, sound, enjoyable science-fiction stories already in print in science-fiction books and magazines that need hardly the changing of a word, and that would still be 99% intelligible to anyone capable of reading without moving his lips.

Maybe better times are ahead. Right at this moment there are a number of fine science-fiction writers who have turned to TV and motion pictures — Robert Bloch, Fritz Leiber, Jerome Bixby, Arthur C. Clarke, John Wyndham and half a dozen others are in some way or another involved — and from their efforts we may yet see great things.

We also may not, because the producers not only seem to make it a point to have non-sf writers write their science-fiction, but when a science-fiction writer comes along they seem to make it their business to put him to work on a mystery or a Western — instead of what he can do best of all.

Science-fiction doesn't *have* to be relegated to the part of the drive-in program where the customers quit watching the screen — but it is likely to go on that way, until some producer discovers that it really has things to say that cannot be said in any other form! — **THE EDITOR**

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Her ancestors were cats. Her heart was human, though, and she gave it once and for all.

THE BALLAD OF LOST C'MELL

SHE was a girly girl and they were true men, the lords of creation, but she pitted her wits against them and she won. It had never happened before, and it is sure never to happen again, but she did win. She was not even of human extraction. She was cat-derived, though human in outward shape, which explains the C in front of her name. Her father's name was C'mackintosh and her name was C'mell. She won her trick against the lawful and assembled Lords of the Instrumentality.

It all happened at Earthport, greatest of buildings, smallest of cities, standing twenty-five kilometers high at the Western edge of the Smaller Sea of Earth.

Jestocost had an office outside the fourth valve.

I

JESTOCOST liked the morning sunshine, while most of the other Lords of the Instrumentality did not, so that he had no trouble in keeping the office and the apartments which he had selected. His main office was ninety meters deep, twenty

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By CORDWAINER SMITH Illustrated by FINLAY

She got the which of the what-she-did,
Hid the bell with a blot, she did,
But she fell in love with a hominid.
Where is the which of the what-she-did?

from THE BALLAD OF LOST C'MELL

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meters high, twenty meters broad. Behind it was the "fourth valve," almost a thousand hectares in extent. It was shaped helically, like an enormous snail. Jestocost's apartment, big as it was, was merely one of the pigeonholes in the muffler on the rim of Earthport. Earthport stood like an enormous wineglass, reaching from the magma to the high atmosphere.

Earthport had been built during mankind's biggest mechanical splurge. Though men had had nuclear rockets since the beginning of consecutive history, they had used chemical rockets to load the interplanetary ion-drive and nuclear-drive vehicles or to assemble the photonic sail-ships for interstellar cruises. Impatient with the troubles of taking things bit by bit into the sky, they had worked out a billion-ton rocket, only to find that it ruined whatever countryside it touched in landing. The Daimoni — people of Earth extraction, who came back from somewhere beyond the stars — had helped men build it of weatherproof, rustproof, timeproof, stressproof material. Then they had gone away and had never come back.

Jestocost often looked around his apartment and wondered what it might have been like when white-hot gas, muted to a whisper, surged out of the valve into his own chamber and the sixty-four other chambers like it. Now he had a back wall of heavy timber, and the valve itself was a great hollow cave where a few wild things lived. Nobody needed that much space any more. The chambers were useful, but the valve did nothing. Planoforming ships whispered in from the stars; they landed at Earthport as a matter of legal convenience, but they made no noise and they certainly had no hot gases.

Jestocost looked at the high clouds far below him and talked to himself,

"Nice day. Good air. No trouble. Better eat."

Jestocost often talked like that to himself. He was an individual, almost an eccentric. One of the top council of mankind, he had problems, but they were not personal problems. He had a Rembrandt hanging above his bed — the only Rembrandt known in the world, just as he was possibly the only person who could appreciate a Rembrandt. He had the tapestries of a forgotten empire hanging from his back wall. Every morning the sun played a grand opera for him, muting and lighting and shifting the colors so that he could almost imagine that the old days of quarrel, murder and high drama had come back to Earth again. He had a copy of Shakespeare, a copy of Colegrove

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and two pages of the Book of Ecclesiates in a locked box beside his bed. Only forty-two people in the universe could read Ancient English, and he was one of them. He drank wine, which he had made by his own robots in his own vineyards on the Sunset coast. He was a man, in short, who had arranged his own life to live comfortably, selfishly and well on the personal side, so that he could give generously and impartially of his talents on the official side.

When he awoke on this particular morning, he had no idea that a beautiful girl was about to fall hopelessly in love with him — that he would find, after a hundred years and more of experience in government, another government on earth just as strong and almost as ancient as his own — that he would willingly fling himself into conspiracy and danger for a cause which he only half understood. All these things were mercifully hidden from him by time, so that his only question on arising was, should he or should he not have a small cup of white wine with his breakfast. On the 173rd day of each year, he always made a point of eating eggs. They were a rare treat, and he did not want to spoil himself by having too many, nor to deprive himself and forget a treat by having none at all. He puttered around the room, muttering, "White wine? White wine?"

C'MELL was coming into his life, but he did not know it. She was fated to win; that part, she herself did not know.

Ever since mankind had gone through the Rediscovery of Man, bringing back governments, money, newspapers, national languages, sickness and occasional death, there had been the problem of the underpeople — people who were not human, but merely humanly shaped from the stock of Earth animals. They could speak, sing, read, write, work, love and die; but they were not covered by human law, which simply defined them as "homunculi" and gave them a legal status close to animals or robots. Real people from off-world were always called "hominids."

Most of the underpeople did their jobs and accepted their half-slave status without question. Some became famous — C'mackintosh had been the first earthbeing to manage a thousand-meter broad-jump under normal gravity. His picture was seen in a thousand worlds. His daughter, C'mell, was a girly girl, earning her living by welcoming human beings and hominids from the outworlds and making them feel at home when they reached Earth. She had the privilege of working

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at Earthport, but she had the duty of working very hard for a living which did not pay well. Human beings and hominids had lived so long in an affluent society that they did not know what it meant to be poor. But the Lords of the Instrumentality had decreed that underpeople — derived from animal stock—should live under the economics of the Ancient World; they had to have their own kind of money to pay for their rooms, their food, their possessions and the education of their children. If they became bankrupt, they went to the Poorhouse, where they were killed painlessly by means of gas.

It was evident that humanity, having settled all of its own basic problems, was not quite ready to let Earth animals, no matter how much they might be changed, assume a full equality with man.

The Lord Jestocost, seventh of that name, opposed the policy. He was a man who had little love, no fear, freedom from ambition and a dedication to his job: but there are passions of government as deep and challenging as the emotions of love. Two hundred years of thinking himself right and of being outvoted had instilled in Jestocost a furious desire to get things done his own way.

Jestocost was one of the few true men who believed in the rights of the underpeople. He did not think that mankind would ever get around to correcting ancient wrongs unless the underpeople themselves had some of the tools of power — weapons, conspiracy, wealth and (above all) organization with which to challenge man. He was not afraid of revolt, but he thirsted for justice with an obsessive yearning which overrode all other considerations.

When the Lords of the Instrumentality heard that there was the rumor of a conspiracy among the underpeople, they left it to the robot police to ferret out.

Jestocost did not.

He set up his own police, using underpeople themselves for the purpose, hoping to recruit enemies who would realize that he was a friendly enemy and who would in course of time bring him into touch with the leaders of the underpeople.

If those leaders existed, they were clever. What sign did a girly girl like C'mell ever give that she was the spearhead of a criss-cross of agents who had penetrated Earthport itself? They must, if they existed, be very, very careful. The telepathic monitors, both robotic and human, kept every thought-band under surveillance by random sampling. Even the computers showed nothing more significant than improbable amounts of happiness in minds

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which had no objective reason for being happy.

The death of her father, the most famous cat-athlete which the underpeople had ever produced, gave Jestocost his first definite clue.

HE WENT to the funeral himself, where the body was packed in an ice-rocket to be shot into space. The mourners were thoroughly mixed with the curiosity-seekers. Sport is international, inter-race, inter-world, interspecies. Hominids were there: true men, 100% human, they looked weird and horrible because they or their ancestors had undergone bodily modifications to meet the life conditions of a thousand worlds.

Underpeople, the animal-derived "homunculi," were there, most of them in their work clothes, and they looked more human than did the human beings from the outer worlds. None were allowed to grow up if they were less than half the size of man, or more than six times the size of man. They all had to have human features and acceptable human voices. The punishment for failure in their elementary schools was death. Jestocost looked over the crowd and wondered to himself, "We have set up the standards of the toughest kind of survival for these people and we give them the most terrible incentive, life itself, as the condition of absolute progress. What fools we are to think that they will not overtake us!" The true people in the group did not seem to think as he did. They tapped the underpeople peremptorily with their canes, even though this was an underperson's funeral, and the bear-men, bull-men, cat-men and others yielded immediately and with a babble of apology.

C'mell was close to her father's icy coffin.

Jestocost not only watched her; she was pretty to watch. He committed an act which was an indecency in an ordinary citizen but lawful for a Lord of the Instrumentality: he peeped her mind.

And then he found something which he did not expect.

As the coffin left, she cried, "Ee-telly-kelly, help me! help me!"

She had thought phonetically, not in script, and he had only the raw sound on which to base a search.

Jestocost had not become a Lord of the Instrumentality without applying daring. His mind was quick, too quick to be deeply intelligent. He thought by gestalt, not by logic. He determined to force his friendship on the girl.

He decided to await a propitious occasion, and then changed his mind about the time.

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As she went home from the funeral, he intruded upon the circle of her grimfaced friends, underpeople who were trying to shield her from the condolences of ill-mannered but well-meaning sports enthusiasts.

She recognized him, and showed him the proper respect.

"My Lord, I did not expect you here. You knew my father?"

He nodded gravely and addressed sonorous words of consolation and sorrow, words which brought a murmur of approval from humans and underpeople alike.

But with his left hand hanging slack at his side, he made the perpetual signal of *alarm! alarm!* used within the Earthport staff — a repeated tapping of the thumb against the third finger — when they had to set one another on guard without alerting the offworld transients.

She was so upset that she almost spoiled it all. While he was still doing his pious doubletalk, she cried in a loud clear voice:

"You mean *me*?"

And he went on with his condolences: ". . . and I do mean *you*, C'mell, to be the worthiest carrier of your father's name. *You* are the one to whom we turn in this time of common sorrow. *Who could I mean but you* if I say that C'mackintosh never did things by halves, and died young as a result of his own zealous conscience? Good-by, C'mell, I go back to my office."

She arrived forty minutes after he did.

II

HE FACED her straight away, studying her face.

"This is an important day in your life."

"Yes, my Lord, a sad one."

"I do not," he said, "mean your father's death and burial. I speak of the future to which we all must turn. Right now, it's you and me."

Her eyes widened. She had not thought that he was that kind of man at all. He was an official who moved freely around Earthport, often greeting important offworld visitors and keeping an eye on the bureau of ceremonies. She was a part of the reception team, when a girly girl was needed to calm down a frustrated arrival or to postpone a quarrel. Like the geisha of ancient Japan, she had an honorable profession; she was not a bad girl but a professionally flirtatious hostess. She stared at the Lord Jestocost. He did not *look* as though he meant anything improperly personal. But, thought she, you can never tell about men.

"You know men," he said, passing the initiative to her.

"I guess so," she said. Her face looked odd. She started to give

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him smile #3 (extremely adhesive) which she had learned in the girly-girl school. Realizing it was wrong, she tried to give him an ordinary smile. She felt she had made a face at him.

"Look at me," he said, "and see if you can trust me. I am going to take both our lives in my hands."

She looked at him. What imaginable subject could involve him, a Lord of the Instrumentality, with herself, an undergirl? They never had anything in common. They never would.

But she stared at him.

"I want to help the underpeople."

He made her blink. That was a crude approach, usually followed by a very raw kind of pass indeed. But his face was illuminated by seriousness. She waited.

"Your people do not have enough political power even to talk to us. I will not commit treason to the true-human race, but I am willing to give your side an advantage. If you bargain better with us, it will make all forms of life safer in the long run."

C'mell stared at the floor, her red hair soft as the fur of a Persian cat. It made her head seemed bathed in flames. Her eyes looked human, except that they had the capacity of reflecting when light struck them; the irises were the rich green of the ancient cat. When she looked right at him, looking up from the floor, her glance had the impact of a blow. "What do you want from me?"

He stared right back. "Watch me. Look at my face. Are you sure, *sure* that I want nothing from you personally?"

SHE looked bewildered. "What else is there to want from me except personal things? I am a girly girl. I'm not a person of any importance at all, and I do not have much of an education. You know more, sir, than I will ever know."

"Possibly," he said, watching her.

She stopped feeling like a girly girl and felt like a citizen. It made her uncomfortable.

"Who," he said, in a voice of great solemnity, "is your own leader?"

"Commissioner Teadrinker, sir. He's in charge of all outworld visitors." She watched Jestocost carefully; he still did not look as if he were playing tricks.

He looked a little cross. "I don't mean him. He's part of my own staff. Who's your leader among the underpeople?"

"My father was, but he died."

Jestocost said. "Forgive me. Please have a seat. But I don't mean that."

She was so tired that she sat down into the chair with an innocent voluptuousness which

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would have disorganized any ordinary man's day. She wore girly girl clothes, which were close enough to the everyday fashion to seem agreeably modish when she stood up. In line with her profession, her clothes were designed to be unexpectedly and provocatively revealing when she sat down — not revealing enough to shock the man with their brazenness, but so slit, tripped and cut that he got far more visual stimulation than he expected.

"I must ask you to pull your clothing together a little," said Jestocost in a clinical turn of voice. "I am a man, even if I am an official, and this interview is more important to you and to me than any distraction would be."

She was a little frightened by his tone. She had meant no challenge. With the funeral that day, she meant nothing at all; these clothes were the only kind she had.

He read all this in her face.

Relentlessly, he pursued the subject.

"Young lady, I asked about your leader. You name your boss and you name your father. I want your leader."

"I don't understand," she said, on the edge of a sob, "I don't understand."

Then, he thought to himself, I've got to take a gamble. He thrust the mental dagger home, almost drive his words like steel straight into her face. "Who . . ." he said, slowly and icily, "is . . . Ee . . . telly . . . kelly?"

The girl's face had been cream-colored, pale with sorrow. Now she went white. She twisted away from him. Her eyes glowed like twin fires.

Her eyes . . . like twin fires.

(No undergirl, thought Jestocost as he reeled, could hypnotize me.)

Her eyes . . . were like cold fires.

The room faded around him. The girl disappeared. Her eyes became a single white, cold fire.

Within this fire stood the figure of a man. His arms were wings, but he had human hands growing at the elbows of his wings. His face was clear, white, cold as the marble of an ancient statue; his eyes were opaque white. "I am the E-telekeli. You will believe in me. You may speak to my daughter C'mell."

The image faded.

Jestocost saw the girl staring as she sat awkwardly on the chair, looking blindly through him. He was on the edge of making a joke about her hypnotic capacity when he saw that she was still deeply hypnotized, even after he had been released. She had stiffened and again her clothing had fallen into its planned disarray. The effect was not stimulating; it was pathetic beyond words, as though

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an accident had happened to a pretty child. He spoke to her.

HE SPOKE to her, not really expecting an answer.

"Who are you?" he said to her, testing her hypnosis.

"I am he whose name is never said aloud," said the girl in a sharp whisper, "I am he whose secret you have penetrated. I have printed my image and my name in your mind."

Jestocost did not quarrel with ghosts like this. He snapped out a decision. "If I open my mind, will you search it while I watch you? Are you good enough to do that?"

"I am very good," hissed the voice in the girl's mouth.

C'mell arose and put her two hands on his shoulders. She looked into his eyes. He looked back. A strong telepath himself, Jestocost was not prepared for the enormous thought-voltage which poured out of her.

Look in my mind, he commanded, for the subject of *underpeople* only.

I see it, thought the mind behind C'mell.

Do you see what I mean to do for the underpeople?

Jestocost heard the girl breathing hard as her mind served as a relay to his. He tried to remain calm so that he could see which part of his mind was being searched. Very good so far, he thought to himself. An intelligence like that on Earth itself, he thought — and we of the Lords not knowing it!

The girl hacked out a dry little laugh.

Jestocost thought at the mind, Sorry. Go ahead.

This plan of yours — thought the strange mind — may I see more of it?

That's all there is.

Oh, said the strange mind, you want me to think for you. Can you give me the keys in the Bank and Bell which pertain to destroying underpeople?

You can have the information keys if I can ever get them, thought Jestocost, but not the control keys and not the master switch of the Bell.

Fair enough, thought the other mind, and what do I pay for them?

You support me in my policies before the instrumentality. You keep the underpeople reasonable, if you can, when the time comes to negotiate. You maintain honor and good faith in all subsequent agreements. But how can I get the keys? It would take me a year to figure them out myself.

Let the girl look once, thought the strange mind, and I will be behind her. Fair?

Fair, thought Jestocost.

Break? thought the mind.

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How do we re-connect? thought Jestocost back.

As before. Through the girl. Never say my name. Don't think it if you can help it. Break?

Break! thought Jestocost.

The girl, who had been holding his shoulders, drew his face down and kissed him firmly and warmly. He had never touched an underperson before, and it never had occurred to him that he might kiss one. It was pleasant, but he took her arms away from his neck, half-turned her around, and let her lean against him.

"Daddy!" she sighed happily.

Suddenly she stiffened, looked at his face, and sprang for the door. "Jestocost!" she cried. "Lord Jestocost! What am I doing here?"

"Your duty is done, my girl. You may go."

She staggered back into the room. "I am going to be sick," she said. She vomited on his floor.

He pushed a button for a cleaning robot and slapped his desktop for coffee.

She relaxed and talked about his hopes for the underpeople. She stayed an hour. By the time she left they had a plan. Neither of them had mentioned E-telekeli, neither had put purposes in the open. If the monitors had been listening, they would have found no single sentence or paragraph which was suspicious.

When she had gone, Jestocost looked out of his window. He saw the clouds far below and he knew the world below him was in twilight. He had planned to help the underpeople, and he had met powers of which organized mankind had no conception or perception. He was righter than he had thought. He had to go on through.

But as partner—C'mell herself!

Was there ever an odder diplomat in the history of worlds?

III

IN LESS than a week they had decided what to do. It was the Council of the Lords of the Instrumentality at which they would work — the brain center itself. The risk was high, but the entire job could be done in a few minutes if it were done at the Bell itself.

This is the sort of thing which interested Jestocost.

He did not know that C'mell watched him with two different facets of her mind. One side of her was alertly and wholeheartedly his fellow-conspirator, utterly in sympathy with the revolutionary aims to which they were both committed. The other side of her — was feminine.

She had a womanliness which was truer than that of any hominid woman. She knew the value of her trained smile, her splendidly kept red hair with its unimagin-

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ably soft texture, her lithe young figure with firm breasts and persuasive hips. She knew down to the last millimeter the effect which her legs had on hominid men. True humans kept few secrets from her. The men betrayed themselves by their unfulfillable desires, the woman by their irrepressible jealousies. But she knew people best of all by not being one herself. She had to learn by imitation, and imitation is conscious. A thousand little things which ordinary women took for granted, or thought about just once in a whole lifetime, were subjects of acute and intelligent study to her. She was a girl by profession; she was a human by assimilation; she was an inquisitive cat in her genetic nature. Now she was falling in love with Jestocost, and she knew it.

Even she did not realize that the romance would sometime leak out into rumor, be magnified into legend, distilled into romance. She had no idea of the ballad about herself that would open with the lines which became famous much later:

She got the which of the what-she-did,
Hid the bell with a blot, she did;
But she fell in love with a hominid.
Where is the which of the what-she-did?

All this lay in the future, and she did not know it.

She knew her own past.

She remembered the off-Earth prince who had rested his head in her lap and had said, sipping his glass of motl by way of farewell:

"Funny, C'mell, you're not even a person and you're the most intelligent human being I've met in this place. Do you know it made my planet poor to send me here? And what did I get out of them? Nothing, nothing, and a thousand times nothing. But you, now. If you'd been running the government of Earth, I'd have gotten what my people need, and this world would be richer too. Manhome, they call it. Manhome, my eye! The only smart person on it is a female cat."

He ran his fingers around her ankle. She did not stir. That was part of hospitality, and she had her own ways of making sure that hospitality did not go too far. Earth police were watching her; to them, she was a convenience maintained for outworld people, something like a soft chair in the Earthport lobbies or a drinking fountain with acid-tasting water for strangers who could not tolerate the insipid water of Earth. She was not expected to have feelings or to get involved. If she had ever caused an incident, they would have punished her fiercely, as they often punished animals or underpeople, or else (after a short formal hearing with no appeal) they would have destroyed

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her, as the law allowed and custom encouraged.

She had kissed a thousand men, maybe fifteen hundred. She had made them feel welcome and she had gotten their complaints or their secrets out of them as they left. It was a living, emotionally tiring but intellectually very stimulating. Sometimes it made her laugh to look at human women with their pointed-up noses and their proud airs, and to realize that she knew more about the men who belonged to the human women than the human women themselves ever did.

ONCE A policewoman had had to read over the record of two pioneers from New Mars. C'mell had been given the job of keeping in very close touch with them. When the policewoman got through reading the report she looked at C'mell and her face was distorted with jealousy and prudish rage.

"Cat, you call yourself. Cat! You're a pig, you're a dog, you're an animal. You may be working for Earth but don't ever get the idea that you're as good as a person. I think it's a crime that the Instrumentality lets monsters like you greet real human beings from outside! I can't stop it. But may the Bell help you, girl, if you ever touch a real Earth man! If you ever get near one! If you ever try tricks here! Do you understand me?"

"Yes, ma'am," C'mell had said. To herself she thought, "That poor thing doesn't know how to select her own clothes or how to do her own hair. No wonder she resents somebody who manages to be pretty."

Perhaps the policewoman thought that raw hatred would be shocking to C'mell. It wasn't. Underpeople were used to hatred, and it was not any worse raw than it was when cooked with politeness and served like poison. They had to live with it.

But now, it was all changed.

She had fallen in love with Jestocost.

Did he love her?

Impossible. No, not impossible. Unlawful, unlikely, indecent — yes, all these, but not impossible. Surely he felt something of her love.

If he did, he gave no sign of it.

People and underpeople had fallen in love many times before. The underpeople were always destroyed and the real people brainwashed. There were laws against that kind of thing. The scientists among people had created the underpeople, had given them capacities which real people did not have (the thousand-yard jump, the telepath two miles underground, the turtle-man waiting a thousand years next to an emer-

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gency door, the cow-man guarding a gate without reward), and the scientists had also given many of the underpeople the human shape. It was handier that way. The human eye, the five-fingered hand, the human size — these were convenient for engineering reasons. By making underpeople the same size and shape as people, more or less, the scientists eliminated the need for two or three or a dozen different sets of furniture. The human form was good enough for all of them.

But they had forgotten the human heart.

And now she, C'mell, had fallen in love with a man, a true man old enough to have been her own father's grandfather.

But she didn't feel daughterly about him at all. She remembered that with her own father there was an easy comradeship, an innocent and forthcoming affection, which masked the fact that he was considerably more cat-like than she was. Between them there was an aching void of forever-unspoken words — things that couldn't quite be said by either of them, perhaps things that couldn't be said at all. They were so close to each other that they could get no closer. This created enormous distance, which was heartbreaking but unutterable. Her father had died, and now this true man was here, with all the kindness —

"That's it," she whispered to herself, "with all the kindness that none of these passing men have ever really shown. With all the depth which my poor underpeople can never get. Not that it's not in them. But they're born like dirt, treated like dirt, put away like dirt when we die. How can any of my own men develop real kindness? There's a special sort of majesty to kindness. It's the best part there is to being people. And he has whole oceans of it in him. And it's strange, strange, strange that he's never given his real love to any human woman."

She stopped, cold.

Then she consoled herself and whispered on, "Or if he did, it's so long ago that it doesn't matter now. He's got *me*. Does he know it?"

IV

THE Lord Jestocost did know, and yet he didn't. He was used to getting loyalty from people, because he offered loyalty and honor in his daily work. He was even familiar with loyalty becoming obsessive and seeking physical form, particularly from women, children and underpeople. He had always coped with it before. He was gambling on the fact that C'mell was a wonderfully intelligent person, and that as a

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girly girl, working on the hospitality staff of the Earthport police, she must have learned to control her personal feelings.

"We're born in the wrong age," he thought, "when I meet the most intelligent and beautiful female I've ever met, and then have to put business first. But this stuff about people and underpeople is sticky. Sticky. We've got to keep personalities out of it."

So he thought. Perhaps he was right.

If the nameless one, whom he did not dare to remember, commanded an attack on the Bell itself, that was worth their lives. Their emotions could not come into it. The Bell mattered: justice mattered: the perpetual return of mankind to progress mattered. He did not matter, because he had already done most of his work. C'mell did not matter, because their failure would leave her with mere underpeople forever. The Bell did count.

The price of what he proposed to do was high, but the entire job could be done in a few minutes if it were done at the Bell itself.

The Bell, of course, was not a Bell. It was a three-dimensional situation table, three times the height of a man. It was set one story below the meeting room, and shaped roughly like an ancient bell. The meeting table of the Lords of the Instrumentality had a circle cut out of it, so that the Lords could look down into the Bell at whatever situation one of them called up either manually or telepathically. The Bank below it, hidden by the floor, was the key memory-bank of the entire system. Duplicates existed at thirty-odd other places on Earth. Two duplicates lay hidden in interstellar space, one of them beside the ninety-million-mile gold-colored ship left over from the War against Raumsog and the other masked as an asteroid.

Most of the Lords were off-world on the business of the Instrumentality.

Only three beside Jestocost were present—the Lady Johanna Gnade, the Lord Issan Olascoaga and the Lord William Not-from-here. (The Not-from-heres were a great Norstrilian family which had migrated back to Earth many generations before.)

The E-telekeli told Jestocost the rudiments of a plan.

He was to bring C'mell into the chambers on a summons.

The summons was to be serious.

They should avoid her summary death by automatic justice, if the relays began to trip.

C'mell would go into partial trance in the chamber.

He was then to call the items in the Bell which E-telekeli

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wanted traced. A single call would be enough. E-telekeli would take the responsibility for tracing them. The other Lords would be distracted by him, E-telekeli.

It was simple in appearance.

The complication came in action.

The plan seemed flimsy, but there was nothing which Jestocost could do at this time. He began to curse himself for letting his passion for policy involve him in the intrigue. It was too late to back out with honor; besides, he had given his word; besides, he liked C'mell — as a being, not as a girly girl — and he would hate to see her marked with disappointment for life. He knew how the underpeople cherished their identities and their status.

With heavy heart but quick mind he went to the council chamber. A dog-girl, one of the routine messengers whom he had seen many months outside the door, gave him the minutes.

He wondered how C'mell or E-telekeli would reach him, once he was inside the chamber with its tight net of telepathic intercepts.

He sat wearily at the table —

And almost jumped out of his chair.

THE conspirators had forged the minutes themselves, and the top item was: "C'mell daughter to C'mackintosh, cat-stock (pure) lot 1138, confession of. Subject: conspiracy to export homuncular material. Reference: planet De Prinsensmacht."

The Lady Johanna Gnade had already pushed the buttons for the planet concerned. The people there, Earth by origin, were enormously strong but they had gone to great pains to maintain the original Earth appearance. One of their first-men was at the moment on Earth. He bore the title of the Twilight Prince (Prins van de Schemering) and he was on a mixed diplomatic and trading mission.

Since Jestocost was a little late, C'mell was being brought into the room as he glanced over the minutes.

The Lord Not-from-here asked Jestocost if he would preside.

"I beg you, sir and scholar," he said, "to join me in asking the Lord Issan to preside this time."

The presidency was a formality. Jestocost could watch the Bell and Bank better if he did not have to chair the meeting too.

C'mell wore the clothing of a prisoner. On her it looked good. He had never seen her wearing anything but girly-girl clothes before. The pale-blue prison tunic made her look very young, very human, very tender and very frightened. The cat family showed only in the fiery cascade of her

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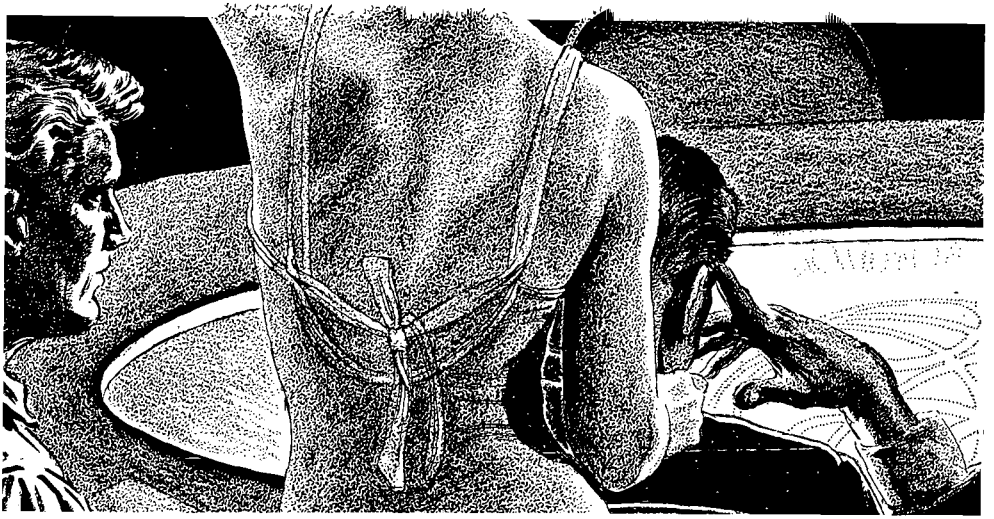

hair and the lithe power of her body as she sat, demure and erect.

Lord Issan asked her: "You have confessed. Confess again."

"This man," and she pointed at a picture of the Twilight Prince, "wanted to go to the place where they torment human children for a show."

"What!" cried three of the Lords together.

"What place?" said the Lady Johanna, who was bitterly in favor of kindness.

"It's run by a man who looks like this gentleman here," said C'mell, pointing at Jestocost. Quickly, so that nobody could stop her, but modestly, so that none of them thought to doubt her, she circled the room and touched Jestocost's shoulder. He felt a thrill of contact-telepathy and heard bird-crackle in her brain. Then he knew that the E-telekeli was in touch with her.

"The man who has the place," said C'mell, "is five pounds lighter

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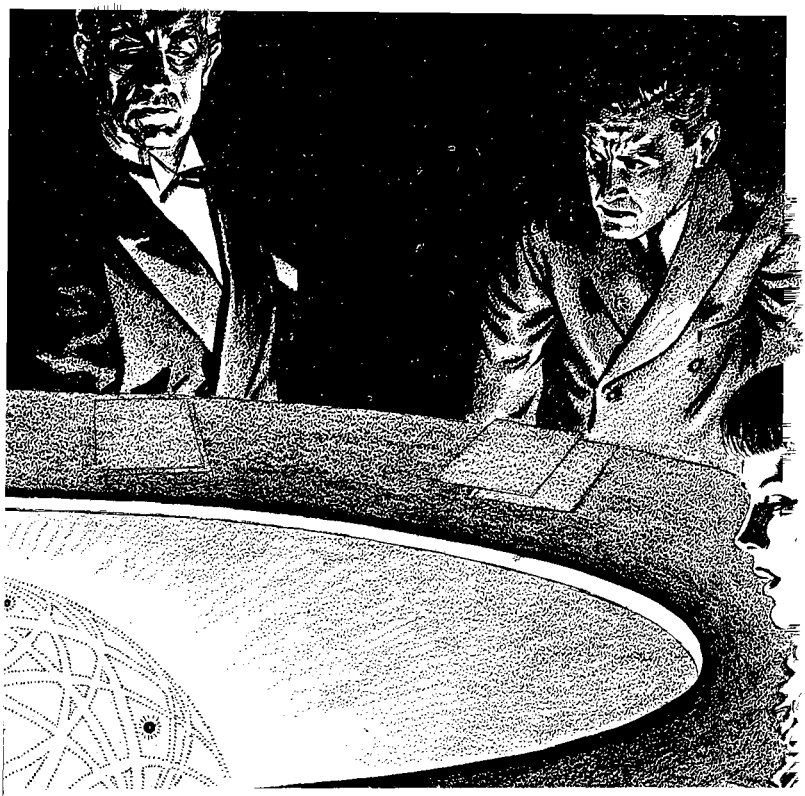

than this gentleman, two inches shorter, and he has red hair. His place is at the Cold Sunset corner of Earthport, down the boulevard and under the boulevard. Underpeople, some of them with bad reputations, live in that neighborhood."

The Bell went milky, flashing through hundreds of combinations of bad underpeople in that part of the city. Jestocost felt himself staring at the casual milkiness with unwanted concentration.

The Bell cleared.

It showed the vague image of a room in which children were playing Hallowe'en tricks.

The Lady Johanna laughed, "Those aren't people. They're robots. It's just a dull old play."

"Then," added C'mell, "he wanted a dollar and a shilling to take home. Real ones. There was a robot who had found some."

"What are those?" said Lord Issan.

"Ancient money — the real

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money of old America and old Australia," cried Lord William. "I have copies, but there are no originals outside the state museum." He was an ardent, passionate collector of coins.

"The robot found them in an old hiding place—right under Earthport."

LORD William almost shouted at the Bell. "Run through every hiding place and get me that money."

The Bell clouded. In finding the bad neighborhoods it had flashed every police point in the Northwest sector of the tower. Now it scanned all the police points under the tower, and ran dizzily through thousands of combinations before it settled on an old toolroom. A robot was polishing circular pieces of metal.

When Lord William saw the polishing, he was furious. "Get that here," he shouted. "I want to buy those myself!"

"All right," said Lord Issan. "It's a little irregular, but all right."

The machine showed the key search devices and brought the robot to the escalator.

The Lord Issan said, "This isn't much of a case."

C'mell sniveled. She was a good actress. "Then he wanted me to get a homunculus egg. One of the E-type, derived from birds, for him to take home."

Issan put on the search device.

"Maybe," said C'mell, "somebody has already put it in the disposal series."

The Bell and the Bank ran through all the disposal devices at high speed. Jestocost felt his nerves go on edge. No human being could have memorized these thousands of patterns as they flashed across the Bell too fast for human eyes, but the brain reading the Bell through his eyes was not human. It might even be locked into a computer of its own. It was, thought Jestocost, an indignity for a Lord of the Instrumentality to be used as a human spy-glass.

The machine blotted up.

"You're a fraud," cried the Lord Issan. "There's no evidence."

"Maybe the offworlder tried," said the Lady Johanna.

"Shadow him," said Lord William. "If he would steal ancient coins he would steal anything."

The Lady Johanna turned to C'mell. "You're a silly thing. You have wasted our time and you have kept us from serious inter-world business."

"It *is* inter-world business," wept C'mell. She let her hand slip from Jestocost's shoulder, where it had rested all the time. The body-to-body relay broke and the telepathic link broke with it.

"We should judge that," said Lord Issan.

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"You might have been punished," said Lady Johanna.

The Lord Jestocost had said nothing, but there was a glow of happiness in him. If the E-telekeli was half as good as he seemed, the underpeople had a list of checkpoints and escape routes which would make it easier to hide from the capricious sentence of painless death which human authorities meted out.

V

THERE was singing in the corridors that night.

Underpeople burst into happiness for no visible reason.

C'mell danced a wild cat dance for the next customer who came in from outworld stations, that very evening. When she got home to bed, she knelt before the picture of her father C'mackintosh and thanked the E-telekeli for what Jestocost had done.

But the story became known a few generations later, when the Lord Jestocost had won acclaim for being the champion of the underpeople and when the authorities, still unaware of E-telekeli, accepted the elected representatives of the underpeople as negotiators for better terms of life; and C'mell had died long since.

She had first had a long, good life.

She became a female chef when she was too old to be a girly girl. Her food was famous. Jestocost once visited her. At the end of the meal he had asked, "There's a silly rhyme among the underpeople. No human beings know it except me."

"I don't care about rhymes," she said.

"This is called 'The what-she-did.' "

C'mell blushed all the way down to the neckline of her capacious blouse. She had filled out a lot in middle age. Running the restaurant had helped.

"Oh, that rhyme!" she said. "It's silly."

"It says you were in love with a hominid."

"No," she said. "I wasn't." Her green eyes, as beautiful as ever, stared deeply into his. Jestocost felt uncomfortable. This was getting personal. He liked political relationships; personal things made him uncomfortable.

The light in the room shifted and her cat eyes blazed at him, she looked like the magical fire-haired girl he had known.

"I wasn't in love. You couldn't call it that . . ."

Her heart cried out, *It was you, it was you; it was you.*

"But the rhyme," insisted Jestocost, "says it was a hominid. It wasn't that Prins van de Schemering?"

"Who was he?" C'mell asked

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the question quietly, but her emotions cried out, *Darling, will you never, never know?*

"The strong man."

"Oh, him. I've forgotten him."

Jestocost rose from the table. "You've had a good life, C'mell. You've been a citizen, a committeewoman, a leader. And do you even know how many children you have had?"

"Seventy-three," she snapped at him. "Just because they're multiple doesn't mean we don't know them."

His playfulness left him. His face was grave, his voice kindly. "I meant no harm, C'mell."

He never knew that when he left she went back to the kitchen and cried for a while. It was Jestocost whom she had vainly loved ever since they had been comrades, many long years ago.

Even after she died, at the full age of five-score and three, he kept seeing her about the corridors and shafts of Earthport. Many of her great-granddaughters looked just like her and several of them practised the girly-girl business with huge success.

They were not half-slaves. They were citizens (reserved grade) and they had photopasses which protected their property, their identity and their rights. Jestocost was the godfather to them all; he was often embarrassed when the most voluptuous creatures in the universe threw playful kisses at him. All he asked was fulfillment of his political passions, not his personal ones. He had always been in love, madly in love —

With justice itself.

AT LAST, his own time came, and he knew that he was dying, and he was not sorry. He had had a wife, hundreds of years ago, and had loved her well; their children had passed into the generations of man.

In the ending, he wanted to know something, and he called to a nameless one (or to his successor) far beneath the ground. He called with his mind till it was a scream.

I have helped your people.

"Yes," came back the faintest of faraway whispers, inside his head.

I am dying. I must know. Did she love me?

"She went on without you, so much did she love you. She let you go, for your sake, not for hers. She really loved you. More than death. More than life. More than time. You will never be apart."

Never apart?

"Not, not in the memory of man," said the voice, and was then still.

Jestocost lay back on his pillow and waited for the day to end.

— **CORDWAINER SMITH**

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Boys! You can raise Giant Mushrooms in your cellar — and that's by no means all!

By RAY BRADBURY

COME INTO MY CELLAR

HUGH FORTNUM woke to Saturday's commotions, and lay eyes shut, savoring each in its turn.

Below, bacon in a skillet; Cynthia waking him with fine cookings instead of cries.

Across the hall, Tom *actually* taking a shower.

Far off in the bumble-bee dragon-fly light, whose voice was already damning the weather, the time, and the tides? Mrs. Goodbody? Yes. That Christian giantess, six foot tall with her shoes off, the gardener extraordinary, the octogenarian-dietitian and town philosopher.

He rose, unhooked the screen and leaned out to hear her cry:

"There! Take *that! This'll* fix you! Hah!"

"Happy Saturday, Mrs. Goodbody!"

The old woman froze in clouds of bug-spray pumped from an immense gun.

"Nonsense!" she shouted. "With these fiends and pests to watch for?"

"What kind *this* time?" called Fortnum.

"I don't want to shout it to the jaybirds, but —" she glanced suspiciously around — "what would you say if I told you I was the first line of defense concerning Flying Saucers?"

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"Fine," replied Fortnum. "There'll be rockets between the worlds any year now."

"There already *are!*" She pumped, aiming the spray under the hedge. "There! Take that!"

He pulled his head back in from the fresh day, somehow not as high-spirited as his first response had indicated. Poor soul, Mrs. Goodbody. Always the very essence of reason. And now what? Old age?

The doorbell rang.

HE GRABBED his robe and was half down the stairs when he heard a voice say, "Special Delivery. Fortnum?" and saw Cynthia turn from the front door, a small packet in her hand.

He put his hand out, but she shook her head.

"Special Delivery Air-Mail for your son."

Tom was downstairs like a centipede.

"Wow! That must be from the Great Bayou Novelty Greenhouse!"

"I wish I were as excited about ordinary mail," observed Fortnum.

"Ordinary?!" Tom ripped the cord and paper wildly. "Don't you read the back pages of *Popular Mechanics*? Well, here *they* are!"

Everyone peered into the small open box.

"Here," said Fortnum, "*what* are?"

"The Sylvan Glade Jumbo-Giant Guaranteed Growth Raise-Them-in-Your-Cellar-for-Big-Profit Mushrooms!"

"Oh, of course," said Fortnum. "How silly of me."

Cynthia squinted. "Those little teeny bits —?"

"Fabulous growth in 24 hours," Tom quoted from memory. "Plant them in your own cellar —' "

Fortnum and wife exchanged glances.

"Well," she admitted, "it's better than frogs and greensnakes."

"Sure is!" Tom ran.

"Oh, Tom," said Fortnum, lightly.

Tom paused at the cellar door.

"Tom," said his father. "Next time, fourth class mail would do fine."

"Heck," said Tom. "They must've made a mistake, thought I was some rich company. Air-mail special, who can afford *that?*"

The cellar door slammed.

Fortnum, bemused, scanned the wrapper a moment, then dropped it into the wastebasket. On his way to the kitchen, he opened the cellar door.

Tom was already on his knees, digging with a handrake

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in the dirt of the back part of the cellar.

He felt his wife beside him, breathing softly, looking down into the cool dimness.

"Those *are* mushrooms, I hope. Not . . . toadstools?"

Fortnum laughed. "Happy harvest, farmer!"

Tom glanced up and waved.

Fortnum shut the door, took his wife's arm, and walked her out to the kitchen, feeling fine.

TOWARD NOON, Fortnum was driving toward the nearest market when he saw Roger Willis, a fellow Rotarian, and teacher of biology at the town high school, waving urgently from the sidewalk.

Fortnum pulled his car up and opened the door.

"Hi, Roger, give you a lift?"

Willis responded all too eagerly, jumping in and slamming the door.

"Just the man I want to see. I've put off calling for days. Could you play psychiatrist for five minutes, God help you?"

Fortnum examined his friend for a moment as he drove quietly on.

"God help you, yes. Shoot."

Willis sat back and studied his fingernails. "Let's just drive a moment. There. Okay. Here's what I want to say: something's wrong with the world."

Fortnum laughed easily. "Hasn't there always been?"

"No, no, I mean . . . something strange — something unseen — is happening."

"Mrs. Goodbody," said Fortnum, half to himself, and stopped.

"Mrs. Goodbody?"

"This morning. Gave me a talk on flying saucers."

"No," Willis bit the knuckle of his forefinger nervously. "Nothing like saucers. At least I don't think. Tell me, what is intuition?"

"The conscious recognition of something that's been subconscious for a long time. But don't quote this amateur psychologist!" He laughed again.

"Good, good!" Willis turned, his face lighting. He readjusted himself in the seat. "That's it! Over a long period, things gather, right? All of a sudden, you have to spit, but you don't remember saliva collecting. Your hands are dirty, but you don't know how they got that way. Dust falls on you every day and you don't feel it. But when you get enough dust collected up, there it is, you see and name it. That's intuition, as far as I'm concerned. Well, what kind of dust has been falling on *me?* A few meteors in the sky at night? Funny weather just before dawn? I don't know. Certain colors, smells, the way the house creaks at three in the morning?

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Hair prickling on my arms? All I know is, the damn dust *has* collected. Quite suddenly I *know*."

"Yes," said Fortnum, disquieted. "But what *is* it you know?"

Willis looked at his hands in his lap.

"I'm afraid. I'm not afraid. Then I'm afraid again, in the middle of the day. Doctor's checked me. I'm A-1. No family problems. Joe's a fine boy, a good son. Dorothy? She's remarkable. With her, I'm not afraid of growing old or dying."

"Lucky man."

"But beyond my luck now. Scared stiff, really, for myself, my family; even, right now, for *you*."

"Me?" said Fortnum.

THEY had stopped now by an empty lot near the market. There was a moment of great stillness, in which Fortnum turned to survey his friend. Willis' voice had suddenly made him cold.

"I'm afraid for everybody," said Willis. "Your friends, mine, and their friends, on out of sight. Pretty silly, eh?"

Willis opened the door, got out and peered in at Fortnum. Fortnum felt he had to speak.

"Well — what do we *do* about it?"

Willis looked up at the sun burning blind in the great, remote sky.

"Be aware," he said, slowly. "Watch everything for a few days."

"Everything?"

"We don't use half what God gave us, ten per cent of the time. We ought to hear more, feel more, smell more, taste more. Maybe there's something wrong with the way the wind blows these weeds there in the lot. Maybe it's the sun up on those telephone wires or the cicadas singing in the elm trees. If only we could stop, look, listen, a few days, a few nights, and compare notes. Tell me to shut up then, and I will."

"Good enough," said Fortnum, playing it lighter then he felt. "I'll look around. But how do I know the thing I'm looking for when I see it?"

Willis peered in at him sincerely. "You'll know. You've got to know. Or we're done for, all of us," he said quietly.

Fortnum shut the door, and didn't know what to say. He felt a flush of embarrassment creeping up his face. Willis sensed this.

"Hugh, do you think I'm — off my rocker?"

"Nonsense!" said Fortnum, too quickly. "You're just nervous, is all. You should take a couple of weeks off."

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Willis nodded. "See you Monday night?"

"Any time. Drop around."

"I hope I will, Hugh. I really hope I will."

Then Willis was gone, hurrying across the dry weed-grown lot, toward the side entrance of the market.

Watching him go, Willis suddenly did not want to move. He discovered that very slowly he was taking deep breaths, weighing the silence. He licked his lips, tasting the salt. He looked at his arm on the door-sill, the sunlight burning the golden hairs. In the empty lot the wind moved all alone to itself. He leaned out to look at the sun which stared back with one massive stunning blow of intense power that made him jerk his head in.

He exhaled. Then he laughed out loud. Then he drove away.

THE lemonade glass was cool and deliciously sweaty. The ice made music inside the glass, and the lemonade was just sour enough, just sweet enough on his tongue. He sipped, he savored, he tilted back in the wicker rocking chair on the twilight front porch, his eyes closed. The crickets were chirping out on the lawn. Cynthia, knitting across from him on the porch, eyed him curiously. He could feel the pressure of her attention.

"What are you up to?" she said at last.

"Cynthia," he said, "is your intuition in running order? Is this earthquake weather? Is the land going to sink? Will war be declared? Or is it only that our delphinium will die of the blight?"

"Hold on. Let me feel my bones."

He opened his eyes and watched Cynthia in turn closing hers and sitting absolutely statue-still, her hands on her knees. Finally she shook her head and smiled.

"No. No war declared. No land sinking. Not even a blight. Why?"

"I've met a lot of Doom Talkers today. Well, two, anyway, and — "

The screen door burst wide. Fortnum's body jerked as if he had been struck. "What!"

Tom, a gardener's wooden flat in his arms, stepped out on the porch.

"Sorry," he said. "What's wrong, dad?"

"Nothing." Fortnum stood up, glad to be moving. "Is that the crop?"

Tom moved foreward, eagerly. "Part of it. Boy, they're doing great. In just seven hours, with lots of water, look how big the darn things are!" He set the flat on the table between his parents.

The crop was indeed plentiful. Hundreds of small grayish brown

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mushrooms were sprouting up in the damp soil.

"I'll be damned," said Fortnum, impressed.

Cynthia put out her hand to touch the flat, then took it away uneasily.

"I hate to be a spoilsport, but . . . there's no way for these to be anything else but mushrooms, is there?"

Tom looked as if he had been insulted. "What do you think I'm going to feed you? Poison fungoids?"

"That's just it," said Cynthia quickly. "How do you tell them apart?"

"Eat 'em," said Tom. "If you live, they're mushrooms. If you drop dead — *well!*"

He gave a great guffaw, which amused Fortnum, but only made his mother wince. She sat back in her chair.

"I — I don't like them," she said.

"Boy, oh, boy." Tom seized the flat angrily. "When are we going to have the next Wet Blanket Sale in *this* house!?"

He shuffled morosely away.

"Tom — " said Fortnum.

"Never mind," said Tom. "Everyone figures they'll be ruined by the boy entrepeneur. To heck with it!"

Fortnum got inside just as Tom heaved the mushrooms, flat and all, down the cellar stairs. He slammed the cellar door and ran angrily out the back door.

Fortnum turned back to his wife, who, stricken, glanced away.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I don't know why. I just *had* to say that to Tom."

The phone rang. Fortnum brought the phone outside on its extension cord.

"Hugh?" It was Dorothy Willis' voice. She sounded suddenly very old and very frightened. "Hugh . . . Roger isn't there, is he?"

"Dorothy? No."

"He's gone!" said Dorothy. "All his clothes were taken from the closet." She began to cry softly.

"Dorothy, hold on, I'll be there in a minute."

"You must help, oh, you must. Something's happened to him, I know it," she wailed. "Unless you do something, we'll never see him alive again."

Very slowly, he put the receiver back on its hook, her voice weeping inside it. The night crickets, quite suddenly, were very loud. He felt the hairs, one by one, go up on the back of his neck.

Hair can't do that, he thought. Silly, silly. It can't do that, not in *real* life, it can't!

But, one by slow prickling one, his hair did.

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THE wire hangers were indeed empty. With a clatter, Fortnum shoved them aside and down along the rod, then turned and looked out of the closet at Dorothy Willis and her son Joe.

"I was just walking by," said Joe, "and saw the closet empty, all Dad's clothes gone!"

"Everything was fine," said Dorothy. "We've had a wonderful life. I don't understand it, I don't, I don't!" She began to cry again, putting her hands to her face.

Fortnum stepped out of the closet.

"You didn't hear him leave the house?"

"We were playing catch out front," said Joe. "Dad said he had to go in for a minute. I went around back. Then — he was gone!"

"He must have packed quickly and walked wherever he was going, so we wouldn't hear a cab pull up in front of the house."

They were moving out through the hall now.

"I'll check the train depot and the airport." Fortnum hesitated. "Dorothy, is there anything in Roger's background — "

"It wasn't insanity took him." She hesitated. "I feel — somehow — he was kidnapped."

Fortnum shook his head. "It doesn't seem reasonable he would arrange to pack, walk out of the house and go meet his abductors."

Dorothy opened the door as if to let the night or the night wind move down the hall as she turned to stare back through the rooms, her voice wandering.

"No. Somehow they came into the house. Right in front of us, they stole him away."

And then:

". . . a terrible thing has happened."

Fortnum stepped out into the night of crickets and rustling trees. The Doom Talkers, he thought, talking their Dooms. Mrs. Goodbody. Roger. And now Roger's wife. Something terrible *has* happened. But *what,* in God's name? And *how?*

He looked from Dorothy to her son. Joe, blinking the wetness from his eyes, took a long time to turn, walk along the hall and stop, fingering the knob of the cellar door.

Fortnum felt his eyelids twitch, his iris flex, as if he were snapping a picture of something he wanted to remember.

Joe pulled the cellar door wide, stepped down out of sight, gone. The door tapped shut.

Fortnum opened his mouth to speak, but Dorothy's hand was taking his now, he had to look at her.

"Please," she said. "Find him for me."

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He kissed her cheek. "If it's humanly possible . . "

If it's humanly possible. Good Lord, why had he picked those words?

He walked off into the summer night.

A GASP, an exhalation, a gasp, an exhalation, an asthmatic insuck, a vaporing sneeze. Someone dying in the dark? No.

Just Mrs. Goodbody, unseen beyond the hedge, working late, her hand-pump aimed, her bony elbow thrusting. The sick-sweet smell of bug-spray enveloped Fortnum heavily as he reached his house.

"Mrs. Goodbody? Still at it?!"

From the black hedge, her voice leapt:

"Damn it, yes! Aphids, waterbugs, woodworms and now the *marasmius oreades*. Lord, it grows fast!"

"What does?"

"The *marasmius oreades*, of course! It's me against them, and I intend to win. There! There! There!"

He left the hedge, the gasping pump, the wheezing voice, and found his wife waiting for him on the porch almost as if she were going to take up where Dorothy had left off at her door a few minutes ago.

Fortnum was about to speak, when a shadow moved inside. There was a creaking noise. A knob rattled.

Tom vanished into the basement.

Fortnum felt as if someone had set off an explosion in his face. He reeled. Everything had the numbed familiarity of those waking dreams where all motions are remembered before they occur, all dialogue known before it fell from the lips.

He found himself staring at the shut basement door. Cynthia took him inside, amused

"What? Tom? Oh, I relented. The darn mushrooms meant so much to him. Besides, when he threw them into the cellar, they did nicely, just lying in the dirt."

"Did they?" Fortnum heard himself say.

Cynthia took his arm. "What about Roger?"

"He's gone, yes."

"Men, men, men," she said.

"No, you're wrong," he said. "I saw Roger every day for the last ten years. When you know a man that well, you can tell how things are at home, whether things are in the oven or the mixmaster. Death hadn't breathed down his neck yet. He wasn't running scared after his immortal youth, picking peaches in someone else's orchards. No, no, I swear, I'd bet my last dollar on it, Roger — "

The doorbell rang behind him. The delivery boy had come up

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quietly onto the porch and was standing there with a telegram in his hand.

"Fortnum?"

Cynthia snapped on the hall light as he ripped the envelope open and smoothed it out for reading.

"TRAVELING NEW ORLEANS. THIS TELEGRAM POSSIBLE OFF-GUARD MOMENT. YOU MUST REFUSE, REPEAT REFUSE, ALL SPECIAL DELIVERY PACKAGES! ROGER."

Cynthia glanced up from the paper.

"I don't understand. What does he mean?"

But Fortnum was already at the telephone, dialing swiftly, once. "Operator? The police, and hurry!"

AT ten-fifteen that night, the phone rang for the sixth time during the evening. Fortnum got it, and immediately gasped. "Roger! Where are you?!"

"Where am I, hell," said Roger lightly, almost amused. "You know very well where I am. You're responsible for this. I should be angry!"

Cynthia, at his nod, had hurried to take the extension phone in the kitchen. When he heard the soft click, he went on.

"Roger, I swear I don't know. I got that telegram from you—"

"What telegram?" said Roger, jovially. "I sent no telegram. Now, of a sudden, the police come pouring onto the southbound train, pull me off in some jerkwater, and I'm calling you to get them off my neck. Hugh, if this is some joke — "

"But, Roger, you just vanished!"

"On a business trip. If you can call that vanishing. I told Dorothy about this, and Joe."

"This is all very confusing, Roger. You're in no danger? Nobody's blackmailing you, forcing you into this speech?"

"I'm fine, healthy, free and unafraid."

"But, Roger, your premonitions . . . ?"

"Poppycock! Now, look, I'm being very good about this, aren't I?"

"Sure, Roger."

"Then play the good father and give me permission to go. Call Dorothy and tell her I'll be back in five days. How *could* she have forgotten?"

"She did, Roger. See you in five days, then?"

"Five days, I swear."

The voice was indeed winning and warm, the old Roger again. Fortnum shook his head, more bewildered than before.

"Roger," he said, "this is the craziest day I've ever spent. You're not running off from

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Dorothy? Good Lord, you can tell *me*."

"I love her with all my heart. Now, here's Lieutenant Parker of the Ridgetown police. Good-by, Hugh."

"Good — "

But the lieutenant was on the line, talking angrily. What had Fortnum meant putting them to this trouble? What was going on? Who did he think he was? Did or didn't he want this so-called friend held or released?

"Released," Fortnum managed to say somewhere along the way, and hung up the phone and imagined he heard a voice call all aboard and the massive thunder of the train leaving the station two hundred miles south in the somehow increasingly dark night.

CYNTHIA walked very slowly into the parlor.

"I feel so foolish," she said.

"How do think I feel?"

"Who could have sent that telegram? And why?"

He poured himself some scotch and stood in the middle of the room looking at it.

"I'm glad Roger is all right," his wife said, at last.

"He isn't," said Fortnum.

"But you just said —"

"I said nothing. After all, we couldn't very well drag him off that train and truss him up and send him home, could we, if he insisted he was okay? No. He sent that telegram, but he changed his mind after sending it. Why, why, why?" Fortnum paced the room, sipping the drink. "Why warn us against special delivery packages? The only package we've got this *year* which fits that description is the one Tom got this morning —" His voice trailed off.

Before he could move, Cynthia was at the wastepaper basket taking out the crumpled wrapping paper with the special-delivery stamps on it.

The postmark read: NEW ORLEANS, LA.

Cynthia looked up from it. "New Orleans. Isn't that where Roger is heading right *now*?"

A doorknob rattled, a door opened and closed in Fortnum's mind. Another doorknob rattled, another door swung wide and then shut. There was a smell of damp earth.

He found his hand dialing the phone. After a long while, Dorothy Willis answered at the other end. He could imagine her sitting alone in a house with too many lights on. He talked quietly with her awhile, then cleared his throat and said, "Dorothy, look. I know it sounds silly. Did any special delivery airmail packages arrive at your house the last few days?"

Her voice was faint. "No."

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Then: "No, wait. Three days ago. But I thought you *knew!* All the boys on the block are going in for it."

Fortnum measured his words carefully.

"Going in for what?"

"But why ask?" she said. "There's nothing wrong with raising mushrooms, is there?"

Fortnum closed his eyes.

"Hugh? Are you still there?" asked Dorothy. "I said: there's nothing wrong with —"

"— raising mushrooms?" said Fortnum, at last. "No. Nothing wrong. Nothing wrong."

And slowly he put down the phone.

The curtains blew like veils of moonlight. The clock ticked. The after-midnight world flowed into and filled the bedroom. He heard Mrs. Goodbody's clear voice on this morning's air, a million years gone now. He heard Roger putting a cloud over the sun at noon. He heard the police damning him by phone from downstate. Then Roger's voice again, with the locomotive thunder hurrying him away and away, fading. And finally, Mrs. Goodbody's voice behind the hedge:

"Lord, it grows fast!"

"What does?"

"*Marasmium oreades!*"

He snapped his eyes open. He sat up.

Downstairs, a moment later, he flicked through the unabridged dictionary.

His forefinger underlined the words:

"*Marasmius oreades:* a mushroom commonly found on lawns in summer and early autumn."

He let the book fall shut.

OUTSIDE, in the deep summer night, he lit a cigarette and smoked quietly.

A meteor fell across space, burning itself out quickly. The trees rustled softly.

The front door tapped shut.

Cynthia moved toward him in her robe.

"Can't sleep?"

"Too warm, I guess."

"It's not warm."

"No," he said, feeling his arms. "In fact, it's cold." He sucked on the cigarette twice, then, not looking at her, said, "Cynthia . . . What if . . . ?" He snorted and had to stop. "Well, what if Roger was right this morning? Mrs. Goodbody, what if she's right, too? Something terrible *is* happening. Like—well—" he nodded at the sky and the million stars — "Earth being invaded by things from other worlds, maybe."

"Hugh!"

"No, let me run wild."

"It's quite obvious we're not being invaded or we'd notice."

"Let's say we've only half-

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noticed, become uneasy about something. What? How could we be invaded? By what means would creatures invade?"

Cynthia looked at the sky and was about to try something when he interrupted.

"No, not meteors or flying saucers. Not things we can *see*. What about bacteria? That comes from outer space, too, doesn't it?"

"I read once, yes—"

"Spores, seeds, pollens, viruses probably bombard our atmosphere by the billions every second and have done so for millions of years. Right now we're sitting out under an invisible rain. It falls all over the country, the cities, the towns, and right now . . . our lawn."

"*Our* lawn?"

"*And* Mrs. Goodbody's. But people like her are always pulling weeds, spraying poison, kicking toadstools off their grass. It would be hard for any strange life form to survive in cities. Weather's a problem, too. Best climate might be South: Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana. Back in the damp bayous, they could grow to a fine size."

But Cynthia was beginning to laugh now.

"Oh, really, you don't believe, do you, that this Great Bayou or Whatever Greenhouse Novelty Company that sent Tom his package is owned and operated by six foot tall mushrooms from another planet?"

"If you put it that way, it sounds funny," he admitted.

"Funny! It's hilarious!" She threw her head back deliciously.

"GOOD grief!" he cried, suddenly irritated. "*Something*'s going on! Mrs. Goodbody is rooting out and killing *marasmium oreades*. What is *marasmium oreades?* A certain kind of mushroom. Simultaneously, and I suppose you'll call it coincidence, by special delivery, what arrives the same day? Mushrooms for Tom! What else happens? Roger fears he may soon cease to be! Within hours, he vanishes, then telegraphs us, warning us not to accept what? The special-delivery mushrooms for Tom! Has Roger's son got a similar package in the last few days? He has! Where do the packages come from? New Orleans! And where is Roger going when he vanishes? New Orleans! Do you see, Cynthia, do you see? I wouldn't be upset if all these separate things didn't lock together! Roger, Tom, Joe, mushrooms, Mrs. Goodbody, packages, destinations, everything in one pattern!"

She was watching his face now, quieter, but still amused. "Don't get angry."

"I'm not!" Fortnum almost

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shouted. And then he simply could not go on. He was afraid that if he did, he would find himself shouting with laughter, too, and somehow he did not want that. He stared at the surrounding houses up and down the block and thought of the dark cellars and the neighbor boys who read *Popular Mechanics* and sent their money in by the millions to raise the mushrooms hidden away. Just as he, when a boy, had mailed off for chemicals, seeds, turtles, numberless salves and sickish ointments. In how many million American homes tonight were billions of mushrooms rousing up under the ministrations of the innocent?

"Hugh?" His wife was touching his arm now. "Mushrooms, even big ones, can't think. They can't move. They don't have arms and legs. How could they run a mail-order service and 'take over' the world? Come on, now. Let's look at your terrible fiends and monsters!"

She pulled him toward the door. Inside, she headed for the cellar, but he stopped, shaking his head, a foolish smile shaping itself somehow to his mouth. "No, no, I know what we'll find. You win. The whole thing's silly. Roger will be back next week and we'll all get drunk together. Go on up to bed now and I'll drink a glass of warm milk and be with you in a minute . . . well, a couple of minutes . . ."

"That's better!" She kissed him on both cheeks, squeezed him and went away up the stairs.

In the kitchen, he took out a glass, opened the refrigerator and was pouring the milk when he stopped suddenly.

Near the front of the top shelf was a small yellow dish. It was not the dish that held his attention, however. It was what lay in the dish.

The fresh-cut mushrooms.

HE MUST have stood there for half a minute, his breath frosting the refrigerated air, before he reached out, took hold of the dish, sniffed it, felt the mushrooms, then at last, carrying the dish, went out into the hall. He looked up the stairs, hearing Cynthia moving about in the bedroom, and was about to call up to her, "Cynthia, did you put *these* in the refrigerator!?"

Then he stopped. He knew her answer. She had not.

He put the dish of mushrooms on the newel-upright at the bottom of the stairs and stood looking at them. He imagined himself, in bed later, looking at the walls, the open windows, watching the moonlight sift patterns on the ceiling. He heard himself saying, Cynthia? And her answering, yes? And him saying, there *is* a way

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for mushrooms to grow arms and legs . . . What? she would say, silly, silly man, what? And he would gather courage against her hilarious reaction and go on, what if a man wandered through the swamp picked the mushrooms, and *ate* them . . . ?

No response from Cynthia.

Once inside the man, would the mushrooms spread through his blood, take over every cell, and change the man from a man to a — Martian? Given this theory, would the mushroom *need* its own arms and legs? No, not when it could borrow people, live inside and become them. Roger ate mushrooms given him by his son. Roger became "something else." He kidnaped himself. And in one last flash of sanity, of being "himself" he telegraphed us, warning us not to accept the special-delivery mushrooms. The "Roger" that telephoned later was no longer Roger but a captive of what he had eaten! Doesn't that figure, Cynthia? Doesn't it, doesn't it?

No, said the imagined Cynthia, no, it doesn't figure, no, no, no . . .

There was the faintest whisper, rustle, stir from the cellar. Taking his eyes from the bowl, Fortnum walked to the cellar door and put his ear to it.

"Tom?"

No answer.

"Tom, are you down there?"

No answer.

"Tom?"

After a long while, Tom's voice came up from below.

"Yes, Dad?"

"It's after midnight," said Fortnum, fighting to keep his voice from going high. "What are you doing down there?"

No answer.

"I said —"

"Tending to my crop," said the boy at last, his voice cold and faint.

"Well, get the hell out of there! You hear me!?"

Silence.

"Tom? Listen! Did you put some mushrooms in the refrigerator tonight? If so, why?"

Ten seconds must have ticked by before the boy replied from below. "For you and Mom to eat, of course."

Fortnum heard his heart moving swiftly, and had to take three deep breaths before he could go on.

"Tom? You didn't . . . that is . . . you haven't by any chance eaten some of the mushroom yourself, have you?"

"Funny you ask that," said Tom. "Yes. Tonight. On a sandwich after supper. Why?"

FORTNUM held to the doorknob. Now it was his turn not to answer. He felt his knees beginning to melt and he fought

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the whole silly senseless fool thing. No reason, he tried to say, but his lips wouldn't move.

"Dad?" called Tom softly from the cellar. "Come on down." Another pause. "I want you to see the harvest."

Fortnum felt the knob slip in his sweaty hand. The knob rattled. He gasped.

"Dad?" called Tom softly.

Fortnum opened the door.

The cellar was completely black below.

He stretched his hand in toward the light switch. As if sensing this intrusion, from somewhere Tom said:

"Don't. Light's bad for the mushrooms."

Fortnum took his hand off the switch.

He swallowed. He looked back at the stair leading up to his wife. I suppose, he thought, I should go say good-by to Cynthia. But why should I think that! Why should I think that at *all?* No reason, is there?

None.

"Tom?" he said, affecting a jaunty air. "Ready or not, here I come!"

And stepping down in darkness, he shut the door.

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THE EARTHMAN'S BURDEN

Mighty Earth was master of all the stars. Trouble was — nobody had told some of the inhabited worlds!

By DONALD E. WESTLAKE
Illustrated by TEMPLETON

HELMUT GLORRING, Commander-in-Chief of the TSS(E&D) *Lawrence*, Vice-Marshal in the Imperial Fleet, Primate Representative of the Empire of Earth and the Protectorate, D.A.S. (Hon.), D.I.L. (Hon.), D.Lib.A. (Hon.), smiled and took the hand of Marine Captain Rink. He then turned, twisted, lifted and hurled Captain Rink over his head and into the wall.

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The captain screamed, and when he rolled away from the wall his left arm was twisted.

The assembled officers dutifully cheered, beating their palms together. Glorring grinned and nodded, flexing his muscles as his two dressers hurried forward with towels and patted him dry. Rink, weaving a bit, got to his feet and staggered away to the infirmary.

"Still the best," muttered Glorring in satisfaction.

The dressers chorused, "Yes, sir!"

Still the best, he thought. The shape he was in, he could even take the Triumvirate, one at a time. But he knew better than to voice that thought aloud. He still wasn't sure which of his officers was the Loyalty Sneak.

As the last of them trailed out of the gym, headed for their duties in other parts of the ship, Chief Astrogator Koll came in, trailed by SSS Citizen Ehlenburgh. "Sir," said Koll, jabbing a thumb at Ehlenburgh, "the Scientist here says we're passing near a Sol-star. He says the charts don't list it, and it might have planets."

GLORRING frowned. The *Lawrence* had been out from Earth over three years now. Seven Lost Colonies had been found and brought—forcibly, unfortunately but unavoidably—back into the fold. And Glorring had more or less decided to skip this time the token search for a habitable yet uninhabited planet which was, in the popular mind at home, the primary purpose for the Fleet.

He was anxious to return to Earth—it wasn't politically safe to be too long away.

He turned to the Scientist. "How good are the chances?" he demanded.

Ehlenburgh, a narrow elderly man in SSS gray, shrugged bony shoulders. "You can never tell. The star is of the right type, but in FTL it's impossible to measure anything as small as planetary mass. Statistically, our chances are good. On the other hand, there are such stars without planets, or without planets on which humans can live. This may be one."

"In other words," said Glorring, "you won't make a definite statement one way or the other."

"I can't," Ehlenburgh told him. "Not in FTL."

"If we're going to stop," said Astrogator Koll, "we'll have to do it within ten minutes, Excellency."

A commander must make his decisions rapidly and confidently. "We'll stop," said Glorring. Without turning around, he barked, "Strull!"

Captain Strull, adjutant, hurried forward and bowed. "Excellency."

"Staff in the Ready Room in

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ten minutes," Glorring told him.

"Very good, Excellency." Strull bowed again and turned toward the door.

"Strull!"

The adjutant stopped, looking apprehensively at Glorring. "Excellency?"

Glorring studied the adjutant a long silent moment, raking him with his eyes. Strull was short, broad-framed, naturally prone to overweight. He had grown lax recently—was probably avoiding the exercise sessions in the gym—and certainly hadn't engaged in any wrestling matches for months now. His potential for fat had become kinetic. Strull bulged within his scarlet uniform, and his chin had multiplied.

His voice deceptively soft, Glorring purred, "Just how much do you weigh, Strull, if you please?"

"Excellency," quavered Strull, "one hundred ninety pounds. If your Excellency pleases."

"You're *fat!*" barked Glorring. "The men of the Fleet must be *lean!* Must be *hard!* Could you wrestle me, Strull, one bone-break?"

"Oh, no, Excellency," said Strull fearfully. "You are much stronger than I, Excellency."

"You have seven days to weigh one-sixty," Glorring told him, "or I'll have the excess carved from you and served to the enlisted men for breakfast. Do I make myself clear?"

"Quite clear, Excellency," said Strull miserably. "Seven days, Excellency."

"I'll be out for the briefing in ten minutes," said Glorring. "I'll want the staff ready."

"Yes, Excellency. Ten minutes, Excellency."

Strull bowed again, more deeply than before, and, maintaining the bow, backed out of the room.

Glorring nodded in satisfaction and turned away, in search of a mirror.

At decreasing multiples of the speed of light, the *Lawrence* approached the Sol-star. On block one, in the most forward section of the ship, Glorring preened before his mirror while the muttering and helplessly indignant Strull padded about, rounding up the staff. On block four, the six gray-garbed members of the SSS—Scientific Survey Staff—checked their equipment and prepared for observation and measurement, or at least five of them did so. One, the psysociohistorian, named Cahann, had nothing to do in this situation. His field was human groupings, not the physical universe of stars and planets. So Cahann, a thin and bitter man, sat morosely in his cubicle and thought his seditious thoughts. Below, on block six, the Marines made fast, preparing for the tran-

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sition to normal speed. Among them was a twenty-year-old Spaceman Third named Elan, indistinguishable from the rest.

CAHANN hated the transitions to and from FTL. The momentary feeling of bodilessness always upset him, irrationally frightening him, as though he were afraid each time that he wouldn't come back together again.

It happened as usual this time. Cahann, swallowing repeatedly and trying to ignore his nausea, reached for a book—any book—and tried to read. The other five Scientists, he knew, would be on their way up to the Ready Room now with their preliminary reports. He could go up with them and hear the news. But he was completely disinterested. This was not a Lost Colony for which they were stopping, and he was just as pleased.

He enjoyed his work. But he hated its consequences.

He longed for his pipe. Most of the time, he could get along somehow without it, but when faced with speed transition he sorely missed its warm comfort.

Well, he reflected, at least this was an unpopulated system, and he could have no false hopes dashed by a weakling Colony. One would think, he told himself for the thousandth time, that at least one of the Lost Colonies would have advanced to the point where it could stand up to the Empire and defend itself. But it just didn't work out that way.

True, Earth had fallen back from the Old Empire into the barbarism of the Dark Ages; but the records had still been there, waiting for men to be ready to use them again. And the colonies, at the time of the collapse of the Old Empire, had been small units, dependent on Earth for most of their technological knowledge and materiel. Only tiny areas of their worlds were tamed. In the time that Earth had rebuilt her Empire, the colonies had had to devote themselves to maintaining the shaky status quo on alien and often dangerous worlds, progressing only slowly.

A brisk rap at the cubicle door was immediately followed by the head of Strull, saying, "His Excellency wants you in the Ready Room. At once."

Cahann looked up. "What for?"

"Don't question his Excellency," snapped Strull.

"I'm not. I'm questioning you."

"And I'm not answering," Strull told him triumphantly, and marched away down the corridor.

Cahann surged out of his chair, knowing exactly what Strull intended to do next. He raced down the corridor, Strull trundling ahead of him, and managed to get

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to the elevator before Strull could close its door in his face.

Cahann grinned. "You'll have to take some of that tonnage off before you can outrace me, Strull," he said.

The barb seemed to strike far deeper than was warranted. Strull got red-faced and beetle-browed and sank into a burning silence. Cahann shrugged.

The Ready Room was filled with an excited buzzing. Glorring in the savage splendor of his golden uniform, prowled across the room to Cahann, smirking happily. "Good news, Cahann!" he announced. "Not only a habitable planet, but populated! There'll be work for you. Sit down, and we'll start the briefing." He turned away, crying, "Ehlenburgh!"

Stunned, Cahann found a seat in the crowded Ready Room. He wondered if he'd heard aright. A populated world, not on the charts? Impossible!

Unconsciously, his hand came up to his mouth, cupped as though holding a pipe-bowl, as he listened to the other Scientists describe the world this ambulatory boil had so unexpectedly discovered.

IT sounded a strange world indeed. Not physically, but in reference to the human population. Physically, it was nearly ideal. It was a rather close approximation of Earth. Somewhat less of it was under water, the climate was generally a few degrees warmer at all latitudes, and the oxygen content of the air was a trifle higher. Gravity was six per cent lighter, and in shape it was a bit more flattened at the poles. Its day was three minutes shorter than that of Earth, and its equator was an impassable jungle belt, devoid of settlements.

All of the settlements, in fact, were in the northern hemisphere, in the middle latitudes. And it was here that the strangeness set in.

These settlements showed no signs of civilization whatever.

No use of artificial illumination at night had been sighted, nor were there evidently airships of any kind. The instruments had failed to detect any use of atomic energy. There were no metropolitan centers. And large segments of land were obviously in cultivation, apparently for food . . . more primitive than which it was impossible to imagine.

A bucolic world, on the face of it. A primitive paradise which had reverted to a pre-civilized agricultural level. Pity they couldn't have been left to stagnate in peace.

Why the world had been left off the charts no one present could guess. The charts, carefully assembled, translated and trans-

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cribed after the New Empire had been built up from the rubble of the Dark Ages following the collapse of the Old Empire, had always been assumed to be correct. The Old Empire had burned itself out in its attempt to seed the stars with humanity, finally bringing about its own collapse and the Dark Ages that had followed by so doing. And during those Dark Ages, contact with the far-flung colonies had been lost. It was only now, five hundred years after the dissolution of the Old Empire, that once again Earth was master of space. Now once again the Protectorate was being expanded, and the Lost Colonies were being rediscovered and reintegrated into the Empire.

The other five Scientists monotoned slowly through their reports, and then Glorring turned inquisitively to Cahann. "You've heard," he said. "What do you think? Are these people peaceful, or are they warlike?"

Cahann shook his head. "I have no idea," he said. "I can't tell much about their social structure from what I've just heard. They're pre-industrial, obviously, and it doesn't seem as though their number can be very large. But we don't have any records. We don't know who founded the colony, how long ago, under what kind of charter, or with what sort of original population. In this situation, there's only one way for me to learn anything, and that's to go down and take a look."

Glorring considered, his bullet head bowed in thought. At last, he said, "You have to see these natives in person, is that it?"

Cahann nodded.

"Very well. We will land near one of the larger settlements, and you will leave the ship. You will spend one hour studying the natives, and then you will return. If you have not returned in that time, we will make every effort to rescue you."

"Thank you," murmured Cahann.

Strull was suddenly active, whispering into His Excellency's ear. Glorring nodded.

"You will have an enlisted man with you," he told Cahann. "To protect you," he lied blandly.

"Thank you," said Cahann, deadpan, not looking at Strull.

II

ELAN and Brent sat together in their cubicle on block six. They had felt the speed-transition, and knew now that the ship was moving in normal speed. But that was all they knew. It didn't seem as though they had come out of FTL for a Colony, since they hadn't been put on battle standby, and of course conflicting rumors were spreading through-

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out the block, and of course none of the Marines actually had any idea at all what was going on. All they could do now was wait.

Elan was using this time to good advantage, shining his combat boots. At twenty, he was tall and slender. Marine life had made him lean and physically hard. It had also taught him the knack of the impassive face, and it had trained him in patience.

He had, like everyone else on Earth, been taken into the service on his sixteenth birthday. After one year of training and an additional year of garrison duty on Earth, he had been assigned to the *Lawrence* for the rest of his twelve-year tour.

He had had trouble adapting to the military life at first. Having been born and raised in the Adirondacks of North America, still the most backward area of Earth, the tight quarters which had seemed so natural to the men from more metropolitan regions had depressed him for a long while, though he had gradually grown used to them.

Brent broke a rather lengthy silence between them by saying, "You never know. It might be a Lost Colony after all. I sure hope so."

"It might be," said Elan noncommitally. He didn't sound as pleased as Brent, but then he wasn't a reconvert, and reconverts were always pleased, always happy.

Reconvert: Former enemy impressed into the service to bring the force back up to strength after a military engagement. Surgical and psychological reconversion, taking five days, was necessary to make such a former enemy a willing and malleable Marine. There was, of course, a good deal lost insofar as initiative, intelligence and personality were concerned, but the remainder was a good Marine.

"I sure hope it's a Lost Colony," said Brent. "I'd be glad to get back into action."

Elan looked at his friend. Brent's squarish face had the bland smile and smooth complexion of the reconvert, and he sat stolidly on his bunk, body completely at rest. In the year and a half that Brent had been on the ship, Elan had never seen any other expression or any other emotion on Brent's face. The reconverts could only be happy.

A trace of wistfulness came into Elan's voice: "You know, Brent, in a way you're lucky."

"Sure I'm lucky," said Brent, happily but without surprise. "Good ship, good outfit, good chow. And every once in a while a chance to see some good action."

"That isn't what I meant," said Elan. "I meant—" he groped for words—"you don't ever *worry*, ever feel sad or lonely or afraid."

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"Sure," smiled Brent. "It's a great life, Elan."

"I could volunteer," said Elan softly, as though talking to himself. "They'd reconvert me if I asked. But I'd lose an awful lot, wouldn't I?"

"Still be the same great outfit," said Brent. "We'd still be here, buddy."

"But I wouldn't be the same." Elan looked down at himself, wearing off-duty uniform, and then gazed out the open side of the cubicle at the other Marines he could see. All alike, every one of them. Only the faces were different. And even there the differences were small, minimized by the deadpan encouraged by the officers.

The thing that he had, that was *him,* that made him unique and different from anyone else—was there any real reason to keep it, if it only gave him pain?

There was only one answer to that. While he gloomily studied it S/2nd Carr, the flight leader, stuck his head into the cubicle and barked, "Elan! Dress uniform on the double and report to Personnel Hatch."

Elan looked up, astonished. "Sir?"

"Don't ask me, all I know is you're going outside. On the double. No weapons."

"Outside," said Elan.

"Maybe there won't be any fight," said Brent, and it was clear that upset him, but he was still smiling happily.

CAHANN leaned against the wall by the open personnel hatch, and pointedly ignored Strull. At the last moment, it had been decided to send the adjutant along. Neither one of them was happy about it.

In a way, Cahann reflected, it didn't matter whether Strull and the enlisted man came along or not. He could still make every effort to explain the situation to the natives, to try to avoid unnecessary bloodshed, convince them that capitulation was their only defense.

The enlisted men's elevator slid open and the Marine who was to accompany them stepped out. Cahann glanced at him, recognized him as only one of the blank-faced enlisted men, and looked over at Strull.

"Spaceman!" called Strull abruptly.

The Marine marched rigidly over to stand in front of Strull and raise both hands high over his head in salute, parroting, "Spaceman Third Class Elan reporting as ordered, sir."

Strull returned the salute half-heartedly, barely raising his hands above his shoulders. The Marine's arms snapped down to his sides. Strull said, "You will

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accompany us, keeping your eyes open for any danger. You will speak only when spoken to or if necessary to give warning of danger. You will not speak to any native under any circumstances. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir," snapped the boy.

"Very well. You will proceed. Cahann, second."

Of course, thought Cahann grimly. Inverse order of rank, when the probability of attack is unknown.

The three of them went out and down the ramp, the Marine first in the dull gray of his dress uniform, Cahann second in the paler gray of his civilian garb, and Strull third, wearing his scarlet uniform.

And the man at the foot of the ramp wore a white shirt and tan knee-length trousers and was barefooted. And smiling.

Cahann stopped abruptly when he saw the native, then started moving again, since the Marine was still descending ahead of him, and Strull was coming along in the rear.

The Marine reached the foot of the ramp.

The native stepped aside to allow him to pass. Then he stepped back into Cahann's path and said, in perfect Terran, "Wondered when you people would make up your minds to land and come out of that silly tin can of yours. The name's Harvey. Welcome to Cockaigne."

Cahann could only gape. *Perfect* Terran? No variations at *all* in five hundred years?

"Well, well, come along," said Harvey with brisk cheeriness. "Got to meet the others, you know."

Strull pushed past Cahann and announced, "I am Adjutant Captain Strull. I greet you on behalf of the Empire of Earth and the Protectorate, and on behalf of Vice-Marshal Helmut Glorring."

Harvey glanced at Strull, nodded, said, "Greetings yourself," and turned away in obvious dismissal. Linking his arm through Cahann's, he said, "It's just over this way. Come along."

III

STRULL marched along in growing indignation, stung by the native's snub and impatient for a chance to do something about it.

The ship had landed in the middle of a large squarish meadow, with forest backed up against low broad hills on three sides. The settlement—the largest one on the planet and still tiny by Earth standards—was on the fourth side. It was toward this settlement that they were walking.

The settlement, when they

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finally came to it, was certainly nothing to crow about, not in Strull's considered opinion. It was about as primitive as one could get and still survive. There wasn't even a transparent dome over the settlement. And these people were surely not advanced enough to have complete weather control; which could only mean that they were, from time to time, actually rained upon!

Strull glanced upward apprehensively, wondering if anything of the kind were about to happen now. But the sky was clear blue, with only a few small fluffy clouds. Strull was pessimistically surprised. The way things were going today, he wouldn't have been a bit surprised if he'd walked directly into a thunderstorm.

Strull looked again at the settlement. Buildings of various sizes and shapes and colors—though none of them more than one story high—were spotted haphazardly here and there, with no order or precision to them at all. Nor was there any sort of pavement or streets, only narrow brown paths worn into the grass, leading hither and yon.

"The meeting hall," Strull heard the native say to Cahann, "is just over this way. We're all anxious to get to know you people better."

When they arrived at the entrance of the meeting hall Strull said coldly, "All right, Cahann, I'll take over." He stepped ahead, following the native inside.

There was just the one room within, and the walls were only the one thickness of planed lumber. At this latitude, it would never get cold enough to make more than that really necessary, though there was a rough stone fireplace in one wall.

An amateurish platform, a foot high, was at the far end, with three small stools on it. Other stools were scattered here and there, not in rows or any sort of order at all. And people were sitting on them, dressed somewhat like the first native, though there was no uniform pattern to their clothing except its rustic simplicity.

The native led the way to the platform and turned to Strull to say, "I imagine you want to make some sort of speech now. Want me to introduce you? Or would you rather just begin on your own?"

"I can handle it myself, thank you," Strull told him, with frosty dignity.

THE native shrugged and went back to sit on one of the stools. Cahann was already seated on the second, and the enlisted man was glancing at the third as though he wasn't quite sure

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whether he should take it or not. Strull gave him a one-second glower, to let him know he shouldn't, and then turned to the audience.

"My name," he boomed, "is Strull, Captain Adjutant to Vice-Marshal Glorring of the TSS (E&D) *Lawrence*. I greet you of the planet, uh—" What the dickens had that native called this place?

The native in question leaned forward to stage-whisper, "Cockaigne."

"Cockaigne, yes. Thank you. I greet you, citizens of the planet Cockaigne, on behalf of the Empire of Earth and the Protectorate, and additionally on behalf of Vice-Marshal Glorring, Primate Representative. I congratulate you on your rediscovery by the Empire of Earth and the Protectorate, and I welcome you as a Confederated State in good standing within the Protectorate and beneath the benign and omnipotent protection of the Empire of Earth."

Strull inhaled, having just barely begun his speech, but he noticed that a bearded native toward the back of the room had risen to his feet and was waving a hand for attention. Strull frowned, paused, and in a lower voice than previously said, "You had a question?"

"That I did," said the man. While somewhat older and more hairy than the first native, he shared with him an identical expression of lazy insolence. "I was just wondering," he said, "how you can manage to rediscover us for your Empire when we were never a part of your Empire to begin with."

Strull allowed a smile of superior knowledge to curve his lips. "Ah," he said, "but you *were* in the Empire at one time, over five hundred years ago. I assume all records of a time that far back have been lost, but I can assure you that it is so. Surprising as it may seem to you, humanity is not native to this world. You are descendants of the original colonists sent here by the Old Empire, which collapsed five hundred years ago and which only now has been fully restored."

"Sorry," said the native, not looking at all sorry, "but you've got your history a little confused. This world wasn't settled five hundred years ago by the Old Empire, it was settled seven hundred years ago by the United States of America."

Strull had never heard the term. He blinked rapidly, saying, "What? What, what?"

And that blasted Cahann spoke up, not bothering at all to hide his dislike for Strull. Didn't he realize that they should show these yokels a united front?

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CAHANN leaned forward to say, "Regional government on Earth. One of the last. There've been some indications in the old manuscripts that it did do some small-scale colonizing of its own, shortly before the Empire took over. We've always assumed that their efforts were unsuccessful."

"Nonsense," said Strull. "Nonsense."

The bearded native shook his head. "Not at all," he insisted. "We beat your Empire by a good two hundred years."

"This planet," said Strull desperately, "is part of the Protectorate of the Empire of Earth, as of this moment, and that's all there is to it! No questions!"

"I've got a question anyway," said a rather attractive young woman toward the front of the hall. "What if we don't *want* to be part of your silly Empire?"

"That," Strull told her happily, on familiar ground again, "would be tantamount to revolution. And we would be regrettably forced to put down any revolution."

"We certainly wouldn't want that," said the young woman. A number of the other natives nodded in agreement, but they all seemed to have faint smiles drifting about their lips, as though they thought the whole discussion rather funny.

The native who had first met them got to his feet and said, "We'll have to talk this over some, and decide what to do about you people. You can go on back to your tin can now. Tell your boss we'll let him know our decision in a day or two."

Strull was just as pleased. He'd come, seen that the natives were anything but dangerous, had said his piece, and now he was more than ready to return to the ship. "Come along," he said to Cahann and the enlisted man.

"These two can stay here," said the native. "We may have some questions to ask them."

"Definitely not!" cried Strull. There was no telling what a seditionist like Cahann might say if left alone with these people.

"They'll be perfectly safe here," said the native unnecessarily. "Go on back to the ship."

Well, in that case— "I will come back with his Excellency in an hour," said Strull.

He was halfway back to the ship before he began to wonder just what the dickens had happened there. He hadn't intended to leave Cahann and the enlisted man, not under any circumstances. But the native had said something—he couldn't precisely remember what any more—and for some reason that had seemed to change things.

Why? He was somehow con-

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fused, he couldn't for the life of him figure out exactly what had happened toward the end there.

It was all that had happened to him today, that's what it was. Glorring being such a nasty martinet about his weight, and Cahann baiting him, and the native being so insolent, and all the rest of it. No wonder he was a little confused.

But his face was still puckered in a bewildered frown as he continued back to the ship.

CAHANN, baffled, watched the natives, who had burst into laughter the minute Strull left the hall. It was his job, as psysociohistorian, to understand and categorize human societies, from the most complex industrial world to the smallest family group. Human social groupings, that was his subject matter, seen in historical context, the sociologist's *what?* complemented by the psychologist's *why?*

In essence, his job was even simpler than that. Every human grouping, from the smallest family to the largest industrial complex, had some sort of loophole in it, some spot for the Empire to insert itself and thus make the grouping at last only another part of the Empire. It was his job to find the loophole. He did the job well, because he enjoyed it in the abstract. He understood that he was making quite a large contribution to the Empire's subjugation of more and more human beings, but he didn't suppose he had any choice in the matter. His work fascinated him, and he could only perform that work in the service of the Empire. His refusal to work would not have changed the course of events one iota. Another psysociohistorian would simply have taken his place, leaping at the opportunity to get away for even a little while from the rigid anti-intellectualism of the college campus.

Since he enjoyed his work, and since he had the curious facility to separate it from its end product, and since he was additionally a highly intelligent man, he was one of the best psysociohistorians in the business. He had progressed to the point where his understanding of new societies and new cultures was so rapid as to be almost intuitive.

This was the first time he had ever been baffled.

All right, these people were not the descendants of Old Empire colonists, they were the descendants of even earlier colonists than that. But they were *people,* nevertheless. They were an aggregate group. They should certainly have reacted in one of a limited number of predictable ways.

They hadn't.

Throughout his contact with

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them so far, they had behaved in no known manner whatsoever. Making fun of Strull—he liked to do that himself, but that was because he knew the little blimp, and he hadn't done it on first meeting him anyway—and acting as though the threat of the ship and its complement of Marines were no threat at all. And then all at once bursting into laughter for no reason that Cahann could see.

THE laughter having finally subsided, Harvey came over to Cahann and said, "You have a lot of questions to ask. That's only natural. Where do you want to begin?"

"I'm not sure," admitted Cahann. He looked at them, and they were all attentive now, more serious than they had been up to now. "I think I'd better begin with basics," he said. "Government, for instance."

"Democratic anarchy," said Harvey promptly. "The will of the minority." He laughed at the expression on Cahann's face. "Not what you're thinking," he said. "Not a ruling minority in your Empire sense." He motioned at the others in the hall. "We're a minority," he said, "of the people on Cockaigne. Every settlement is a minority. If you disagree with us, you can go find a settlement where people agree with you. If there is no such place, you can either change your thinking or be a hermit, it's up to you."

"What about criminals?" Cahann asked him. "What do you do with them?"

"Hermits," said Harvey succinctly.

"All right, what about money?"

Harvey shook his head. "I know what you mean," he said, "but we don't use it. A society has to be more complex and sophisticated than ours to need money. Value symbols—and that's what money is, after all—are usually the result of expanding travel, trade over larger and larger areas. We rarely travel, and we neither import nor export, so simple barter is good enough for us."

"What about war between the settlements?" Cahann asked him.

"None," said Harvey. "Controlled population growth is a better answer. We don't need more land than we have."

"You've never had a war?"

"Never."

"So you don't have much by way of military armaments."

"Nothing at all."

"Then why," Cahann demanded, "are you so sure you won't be conquered by that shipload of Marines out there?"

That set them all laughing again, though Cahann couldn't see that he'd said anything particularly funny. He glanced at the

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Marine, and saw only the normal blank expression. The Marine was staring straight ahead, at nothing.

The laughter stopped abruptly, and Harvey said, "I'm sorry, Cahann. You don't understand the situation here yet."

"I'm well aware of that," said Cahann stiffly.

"You aren't going to understand by asking questions," Harvey told him. He got to his feet and said, "I can show you more easily than I can explain to you. Do you want to come along with me?"

Cahann hesitated, then stood. The Marine did likewise, but Harvey said, "You stay here, Elan, if you please. Harriet there wants to talk to you while we're gone." He gestured at the young woman who had spoken to Strull, and who was now coming forward, smiling pleasantly.

Cahann said hesitating, "I'm not sure—"

"—you should separate?" finished Harvey, smiling again. "Face it, Cahann, the two of you together with a roomful of us are no safer than you would be separated. Come along."

Cahann paused again, then shrugged and said, "You're right." With a backward glance at the Marine, whose expressionless face was beginning to crack under an onslaught of frightened bewilderment, he followed Harvey out of the meeting hall.

Outside, Harvey gestured away to the right, deeper into the settlement. "This way," he said.

Something in the man's tone, or in his expression, or perhaps just in the posture of his body, made Cahann suddenly apprehensive. Just what was this he was walking into?

"You want to know, don't you?" Harvey asked him, challenging him.

"Yes," said Cahann. "Yes, I want to know." He stepped out firmly in the direction the other man had indicated.

IV

ELAN was alone now, and scared out of his wits. The girl who'd been called Harriet came up on the platform, smiling at him in a useless attempt at reassurance. "Please don't be frightened, Elan," she said. "We just want to get to know you, that's all."

He looked at them, too frightened at being alone to be able to read their expressions.

Harriet sat down beside him. "Don't be upset, Elan. Just talk to us. Tell us about yourself."

He mumbled, "I don't know what to say."

"Tell us about your life on the ship," she suggested.

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His mind filled with memories of the rigid military discipline of the ship, but he knew better than to give information to potential enemies and so said only, "Life on the ship is just ordinary. Like garrison duty anywhere. That's all."

Unexpectedly, that seemed to satisfy them, and the girl Harriet said, "Tell us about Earth, then. Tell us about your home on Earth."

Earth. Home! Oh, but that was something else again. His home section, peaceful and beautiful.

Harriet said, surprise plain in her face and voice, "Is *all* of Earth like that?"

He stared at her, and felt a moment of complete panic. *He hadn't said anything!*

She seemed to understand. She laughed, a bit shakily, and patted his hand. "Don't go so goggle-eyed," she told him. "The expression on your face told volumes. It's clear you love your own home section, but what of the rest of Earth? Tell us about the big cities."

He made as though to rise. "I —I have to go back—"

"No, no, they'll come for you. They said it was all right for you to stay here." She held his hand, gazing at him with an expression he couldn't define. "Little rabbit," she said soothingly. "Poor little rabbit. No one will frighten you any more."

GLORRING had stripped down to loinpiece and was wrestling with Chief Astrogator Koll when Strull returned. Seeing the adjutant enter the ready room, Glorring quit fooling around. He kneed the astrogator, kidney-punched him and gave him an elbow in the eye. Koll staggered back across the ready room, while the other officers shouted appreciation. Glorring signaled the end of the match.

Immediately, his dressers came forward to towel him dry and put his golden uniform back on him.

Glorring gazed bleakly at Strull. "Took you long enough," he snapped. "Report."

"Yes, sir. We encountered the natives and—"

"Where's Cahann?" Glorring interrupted.

"I left him there," said Strull promptly. "He—"

"You what?"

"I left the enlisted man with him," explained Strull. "There's nothing to worry about, Excellency."

"Oh, there isn't, eh?" Glorring couldn't stand a weakling, and Strull was by far the weakest boob on the ship. It was about time, Glorring decided, to make a man out of that wart. "You go right on, *Captain* Strull," he said. "You go right on and tell me all about it."

"Yes, sir," said Strull briskly,

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and then seemed to falter. He looked completely confused for a second, and then said, "Well, uh, as I said, we encountered the natives. I spoke to a group of them in their meeting hall, telling them who we were and the purpose of our coming here. They claimed, by the way, that they weren't Old Empire colonists after all, but colonists from an even earlier time than that. I forget the name of the government that sent them, but they claimed it was seven hundred years ago."

Koll, somewhat recovered, chimed in, "So that's why they weren't on the charts."

"It would seem so," said Glorring. "Go on, *Captain* Strull. We haven't come to the interesting part yet. The part where you left Cahann and the Marine and returned to the ship alone."

"Yes, sir." Strull gnawed a lower lip for a second, as though gathering his thoughts, and then went on in a rush. "Well, sir, after I spoke to these natives, I got suspicious. They're as backward a bunch as you'll ever see. Not a bit of mechanization around them at all. But they talk as though they don't even consider us a threat. Apparently, they feel as though they have some sort of secret weapon or something. So I ordered Cahann to stay behind, because he's particularly qualified for that sort of thing, and see what he could find out from the natives. And I ordered the Marine to stay and keep an eye on Cahann."

"Brilliant," said Glorring, with heavy sarcasm. "Absolutely brilliant, *Captain* Strull."

"Of course," said Strull hastily, "there was another reason, too. It was impossible in the short time I was there to get any idea of their system of government. And of course mine was just first contact, and I had no wish, your Excellency, to usurp *your* prerogative of direct negotiation with the local governmental leaders. So Cahann is to find out just who heads the local government and where he can be found, so you'll be able to go directly to him when the time comes and not have to waste time asking directions of underlings."

Glorring raised an eyebrow. That made sense, surprisingly. Of course, Strull was only currying favor by doing this, but nevertheless it was sensible for Glorring to be able to go directly to the local authority. "Very well," he said. "You did better than I expected, Strull. Very good."

Strull bowed, relief plain on his face. "Thank you, Excellency."

"Very well," said Glorring, to the room in general. "We will give Cahann an hour to find out all he can. In one hour, I shall leave the ship. We shall be escorted by one flight of Marines on foot, the

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other three flights to be at combat-ready stations. One hour."

CAHANN was in love. It had just happened.

It was calling to him, because it loved him, and he went to it, because he returned that love, because he loved it as much as it loved him, because to love it and to be loved by it was greater and more wonderful and more right than anything else in all of life.

They had left the meeting hall, he and Harvey. They had walked, almost aimlessly, among the scattered unordered buildings of the settlement and slowly it had grown upon him, this acquisition of love, this new understanding of the meaning and depth of love, this new completion which was possible only with the loved one, close to the loved one, blending with the loved one . . .

It was in this direction. Not far away now, closer and closer. They had walked aimlessly, almost as though Harvey were allowing Cahann to choose his own direction. Then Cahann *had* chosen his direction, and it was this way, this way toward love and toward fulfillment and toward completion, this way toward *It* which desired him above all things.

Before, just after they'd left the meeting hall, Cahann had been full of questions, had tried to ask them at once, but Harvey had raised a hand to stop him, saying, "Not yet. I'll answer all your questions, I promise that, but not just yet. Let me show you this first."

"What is it?" Cahann had asked him.

"I don't think I could explain it to you," Harvey had said. "When you see it, you'll understand why. When you see it, you'll understand a lot of things that are puzzling you now."

"This thing, whatever it is you want to show me," Cahann had said, "this is what you think will protect you from the Empire, is that it?"

"Not precisely," Harvey had said. "Please, don't try to guess. That won't do any good. Just come along. Once you've seen it, you'll understand; and that will be that."

So they had fallen silent. And they had walked aimlessly, back and forth, and Cahann had just about come to the conclusion that he was being given a runaround, that they were simply retracing their steps among the buildings of the settlement and not really getting anywhere at all, when the first faint touches of it had reached him.

Desire.

Love.

Warmth and compassion and understanding.

A need for *him,* for him and

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him alone of all the creatures of the universe, all the creatures that had ever lived or ever would live, for no one and nothing but *him.*

It had come upon him almost unnoticeably, like an aroma creeping into a room, and it is strong in the room before you even notice it. And so it was with this, it was only a faint unnoticed sensation until suddenly it had been there for a long time and had grown strong and was now all-pervasive in his mind.

This way, it called. *This way.*

A message of love, a message of desire and understanding and fulfillment; and he had followed it, he had turned in the path it had pointed out, and now Harvey trailed him, unnoticed and unneeded, and he hurried toward his beloved, who hungered for him.

He felt like running, but there was really no reason to run. They would have all eternity together, now that they had found one another at last. And so he walked through the settlement, striding certainly forward, eyes bright with love and hope. He reached the last of the houses of the settlement and the edge of the woods beyond, and stepped unhesitatingly into the woods, for the loved one was in there, beckoning to him, calling for him, needing him.

And Harvey trailed along behind him, two or three paces behind him.

HE was getting closer and closer, so close he could feel his skin tingling with anticipation, so close that the sweat broke out all over his body and his mouth hung open and his eyes stared for a sight of the beloved.

And then, at last, he came to it, where it stood in its own small clearing.

It was the head of Medusa, a thick green plant with many sinuous waving arms reaching up and out from the single stubby base, the whole nearly eight feet high and five feet in diameter. The rubbery green branches, or arms, swayed slowly, as though from a breeze, and at their tips were great scarlet flowers with thick petals, the flowers as big as a man's head. The arms swayed voluptuously, and the petals of the flowers, which looked like great rough tongues, scraped together with a sound like the smacking of dry lips.

This was *It,* the beloved, the purpose of all life.

This was his destination and his ending and his fulfillment.

For what greater purpose could any creature have than the satisfaction of the hungers of *It?*

What was there in life more wonderful than the feeding of *It?*

How grand and blessed and wonderful it was that he had been chosen, he of all the beings that lived and moved, he had been

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chosen to give himself to the beloved, to feed it and so to become a part of it forever.

To throw himself at its base and give himself to its hunger.

But as he stepped forward into the clearing, and the great scarlet flowers beckoned and bowed to him, he was suddenly stopped. Some petty creature was clutching at him, trying to hold him back, trying to keep him from his proper completion.

He pushed the creature aside. But it came back, and again, grabbing at him, clutching at him, pulling him away, keeping him always just out of reach of the beckoning scarlet flowers which hungered for him.

And then more of the foul filthy creatures arrived and overpowered him. And though he fought against them, though *It* gave him the strength of fury and of love, he was borne down and back, carried bodily away from the clearing and away from the sight of his beloved.

And still he fought, and the creatures dragged him back and back, out of the woods and among constructions which were of no moment to him, for the beloved was there, back there, still calling to him.

And when at last he knew that it was hopeless, that the creatures were not going to release him ever, that he would never be able to complete himself at the base of his beloved, he shrieked with the torment of the greatest loss and the greatest sorrow that any being had ever known. He shrieked and shrieked, till one of the creatures struck him. And then blackness rushed in, and he knew no more.

V

THEY could read his mind! Every thought!

Elan sat on the platform in terror of his life. That was their secret, and he knew it now, and the nature of their secret was such that they must know he knew it.

The girl Harriet's slip when she had asked him to describe his home had been the first indication, but it had seemed too fantastic to be believed, and he had chosen to accept her flimsy excuse.

But gradually, as the questioning had gone on, he had seen that the people in the room were listening attentively not to the evasions and generalizations he was saying but to the truths he was thinking. The play of expression on an unguarded face, a look passing between two people, things which could have been produced only by his thoughts, and not by his words.

Until finally there just wasn't any choice any more, there

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weren't any other possible answers. But still they played out the game with him, Harriet asking the questions and he stumbling through the useless answers.

At one point, a kind of wave seemed to go through them all, they looking at one another with suddenly widened eyes, and five men at the back of the room got to their feet and hurried outside. He tried to recall what his thoughts had been at that second, but it didn't seem as though their strange apprehension had anything to do with him.

The scientist, Cahann?

Harriet patted his hand again, saying, "Be easy, Elan. You have nothing to fear."

He stared at her. "You know what I'm thinking," he whispered. "You're reading my mind."

"Be easy, Elan," she said softly. "Don't always expect the worst of humanity. Not all of mankind has chosen the path of Earth."

Then they were silent. He looked from face to face, and knew that they were talking to one another without words, deciding what to do with him and with Cahann and with all the people on the ship.

The silence was suddenly shattered by a shriek from outside the building, and a second shriek on the heels of the first. "Cahann!" he cried, leaping to his feet. Jumping from the platform, he raced through the natives to the door and outside.

He ran around the corner of the building, and stopped dead.

A little distance away was the man named Harvey, and with him were the five men who had left the meeting hall so hurriedly a few minutes before.

And at their feet lay the body of Cahann.

THE small band marching out from the ship in the sunlight looked hard and lean and impressive. In the lead, herculean in his golden uniform, marched Glorring. Directly behind him Strull, and next back two officers marching abreast, Majors Londin and Corse, respectively in green and black. Behind them, Captains Rink (his left arm in a sling) and Stimmel and Pleque, in blue and maroon and pale rose. Next, Lieutenants Braldor, Chip, Sassen, Kommel and Koll, in the multicolored uniforms preferred by most junior officers. And, bringing up the rear, the flight of Marines in dress gray, S/1st Lorettá two paces ahead of them and S/2nd Kallett at the head of the middle squad.

There was no music, there were no flags. These were considered frills, and an Exploration & Discovery ship was notoriously devoid of frills.

But they were impressive any-

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way. The Marines looked deadly grim, and the officers in their bright colors hearkened back to the bright-plumed or feather-decorated or body-painted warriors of the dim past. These were the warriors of the Empire, respecting no one but themselves, desiring nothing but conquest, owing allegiance only to the Empire which equipped them and sent them on their missions.

Glorring, in the lead, breathed the sweet air and cast an eye of ownership over his world.

And it was *his* world, much more so than any other Lost Colony he had bagged for the Empire. Here was a verdant globe, already stocked with colonists, its existence unsuspected at home.

Glory came to the men who shepherded the stray Colonies back to the flock. How much more glory for the man who discovered a brand new stray!

Perhaps he might bring a few specimens of the local colony back with him. Say ten of them. Unusual, of course, but this was an unusual world, an *unknown* world. Yes, he would bring ten of the natives back to Earth with him.

As they came closer to the settlement, Glorring spied Cahann and the enlisted man, waiting near the closest of the buildings. They were too far away for the vice-marshal to be able to read their expressions, but he knew what they must be. Admiring envy on the part of Cahann. Military pride on the part of the Marine.

And, on the faces of the group of natives waiting with them, could there be any expression possible other than a wonderful awe?

Beneath the silver skirts, he all at once executed a little hop, the time-honored method for changing step.

Simultaneously, all the marchers behind him did exactly the same thing.

He didn't pay any attention to that at all.

CAHANN'S expression was somewhat greenish, but not with envy. It was more the greenish tinge of seasickness. He had a lot to recover from.

His memory of—the thing, it, the beloved, whatever it had been—was dim and blurred, and he had the feeling he didn't want to remember it any more clearly than he did.

There had been an urge, a compulsion, that had seemed at the time to be right and proper and natural, and that had also seemed to come from within, to be his own invention and own decision.

He remembered the urge, remembered with a shudder what the urge had been, even remembered to some extent the all-inclu-

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sive compulsion of the thing. But his memory was pedantic and unreal, as though he were remembering a particularly vicious torture which he had never seen practiced on anyone but about which he had read graphic and detailed accounts. They were second-hand memories; he was buffered to some extent from their impact.

On regaining consciousness, the first thing he had seen had been Harvey's face, almost comically worried. And through a surrealistic damping, he had vaguely heard Harvey's voice:

"Cahann! Come out of it, Cahann, it's all over! Come on, man, it's over now, the thing doesn't want you any more."

The last phrase had done it. He had sat bolt upright, prepared to scream, and Harvey's hand had clapped tight to his mouth, holding him rigid until the need to scream had passed. Then the hand had fallen away. Harvey, hunkered down beside him, said, "I'm sorry, Cahann, more sorry than you know. I hope you can forgive me."

"Forgive you?" Cahann raised a shaking hand to wipe his forehead. "I don't know yet what you did to me," he confessed.

"I had no idea," Harvey told him, "just how strong the enticer could be for somebody who didn't have any preparation. No wonder it killed so many in the first few generations."

"What was it?" Cahann asked him. He felt stronger now, but his limbs ached as though he'd been tensing them too hard for too long. "What in time *was* it?"

"Our ancestors called it 'enticer,'" Harvey told him. "When they came here, the plant infested the whole planet. There's only a few left now, except around the jungle belt of the equator. We haven't bothered to clean them out down there. We can't use the land anyway, and their range isn't very far."

"But what *is* it?"

"It's an enticer," said Harvey. "It entices animal food, broadcasting a kind of telepathic beam that attracts anything that moves. We think the beam is connected with the flowers' smell, but we've never proved it one way or the other."

"All right," said Cahann shakily. "It got to me, so it does work. But why doesn't it go after you people? Why only me?"

"It does go after us," Harvey told him. "It goes after every living thing that gets close enough."

"You mean you've built up resistance to it? I don't see how you get the chance."

"IT doesn't work quite that way." Harvey seemed to consider for a moment, and then

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he said, "Have you ever heard of mental telepathy?"

"Of course."

"What do you think of it, as a possibility?"

"I think it's nonsense," said Cahann promptly. So did Harvey, saying it right with him word for word.

Cahann frowned. "What was that all about?" he asked, and Harvey asked the question in harmony with him.

Cahann pondered, then nodded his head, saying, "Oh, I get it. But that doesn't—" He stopped, rather precipitately. Because every one of the twenty or twenty-five natives around him had been saying exactly the same words, in chorus with him.

Harvey smiled slightly. "You think that doesn't prove anything," he said, "because those are the words you might have been expected to say. All right, say something unexpected."

Cahann looked at him, thinking furiously. He glanced at the enlisted man, who was gaping at everything with such a complete look of blank astonishment that Cahann at once felt better. At least there was *one* person present who was more baffled than he.

Cahann gnawed on the inside of his cheek, trying to think. Telepathy? The word was known, the field existed, but the researchers in the field were, so far as Cahann had ever known, exclusively crackpots and panacea-peddlers.

Could the thing really exist? All he had to do was open his mouth and say one word, any word at all, and he would know.

He wasn't quite sure he *wanted* to know.

Mind-readers.

Peeping toms.

No privacy at all.

"It isn't as bad as all that," Harvey told him. "Shields do develop. Go ahead, say something."

Cahann took a deep breath and said: "Canteloupe!"

Twenty-five voices bellowed it with him: "Canteloupe!"

Harvey smiled. "Okay?"

VI

CAHANN felt suddenly tired. Too much too soon. He wiped his forehead with his palm. He was still sitting on the ground, Harvey squatting beside him and the others, with the goggle-eyed Marine, standing around in front of him. He leaned forward, arms lax, and gazed bleakly at the ground between his knees.

"All right," he said dully. "Tell me about it."

"I don't know what the colonization methods of the Old Empire were," Harvey told him, "but our ancestors were on a one-way street. They got on their ship, left Earth, traveled until they found a

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place where they could land and live, and that was it. There was no contact with Earth, and no way to get back to Earth. Nor was there any way to leave their new home once they'd chosen it. The ship needed a complex launching pad they weren't equipped to build.

"So they came here," he went on, motioning at the world around them. "They landed, stripped down the ship for parts, planted, started to build shelters . . . and then the enticer went to work on them."

"The way it did on me," said Cahann.

"Exactly. Now, here's the point. Telepathic ability is dormant, to a greater or lesser extent, in every human being who ever lived. Back on Earth, there were countless cases of individuals whose ability was advanced almost to the threshold of self-awareness. You see, the capability is greater in some people than in others. Just as some people have better memories than others, some are better at mathematics than others, and so on."

Cahann nodded.

"To get back to the original settlers of Cockaigne," said Harvey. "They were stranded here, five thousand of them. And they were being picked off by the enticer, which struck them telepathically, and below the level of conscious resistance. Do you see what that meant?"

"I think so," said Cahann. "It meant that the people with the greatest telepathic capacity would be the ones most likely to survive. The ones who could catch what the enticer was doing in time to get back out of range."

"Of course," said Harvey. "On this planet, for the first time in man's history, telepathic ability was the *primary survival characteristic.* This world forced man to breed for telepathy. The survivors of each generation were just a little bit more advanced toward full use of the ability than the generation before them."

"Until now," Cahann finished for him, "you are all fully telepathic."

"Exactly. And with, in addition, the complementary abilities that go along with it. Such as the shield. And such as, for instance—well, for instance, what's your name?"

He looked at Harvey blankly. Why ask that?

"Come on," said Harvey. "Tell me your name."

"My name's . . ."

He didn't know. He thought desperately, trying to remember, and it just wasn't there. He didn't know his own name! It was as though he had never had a name, as though a name had never been given him.

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"Your name's Cahann," Harvey told him gently.

Of course! How stupid to forget it!

Cahann looked sharply at Harvey, in sudden understanding. "You made me forget it."

Harvey nodded.

It was as though a dull weight were pressing on Cahann's soul. "Is there no limit to what you people can do?" he asked.

"There are limits," Harvey told him, "but they're nothing to worry about."

"What are you going to do with us?"

"We've been trying to decide. At first, when you'd just landed here, we thought the best thing to do was make you take off again at once, and give you the idea the planet was uninhabitable. It's unlikely any other Earth ship will ever stumble across us."

"I wish you had done that," Cahann told him.

HARVEY smiled. "You won't when we're finished with you," he said. He motioned at the Marine, still goggle-eyed in the background. "See Elan there? He's an intelligent boy. He's also a latent telepath of a very high order. Harriet tells me she thinks she could bring the ability out completely in less than a year. But do you know what Earth has done to that boy?"

Cahann looked at the Marine, not understanding. He hadn't ever really paid any attention to him, he was simply an impassive face and a uniform, one of the depersonalized enlisted men from block six.

"Of course," said Harvey. "That's what you think of him. That's what everybody thinks of him. They've told him so long and so often that he doesn't count as a person, as an individual, that he believes it himself by now. Do you know that he has seriously considered requesting reconversion, to kill off the individuality which was only worthless and which brought him only self-doubt and worry? Do you know that four per cent of Earth's Marines every year volunteer for reconversion? That's how little life and individual worth have come to mean with you people."

"I didn't know the figures," said Cahann distractedly. He was gazing at the Marine, trying to see him as a person, trying to see him the way Harvey saw him. It wasn't easy to do.

"Your Empire," Harvey told him, steel now coming into his voice, "is an open sore. It's a gaping wound on the face of the universe. We wouldn't feel right if we let it go on."

"No," said Cahann. "With all of your powers, you can't do that. You can't fight the Empire. One

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ship, yes, you could beat one ship. But not the Empire."

"Don't be so sure."

A native came strolling up at that point, casually saying, "Group of them forming outside the ship. They're going to come this way."

"All right." Harvey got to his feet, saying, "Come along, Cahann. We can talk while waiting for them."

Cahann stood up, awkwardly. He was stiff and aching in every joint. He limped along beside Harvey, the Marine and the other natives following.

Harvey said, "We're going to have to make you forget most of this, but only temporarily. We'd rather not give the Empire any warning. Ten of us are going to go back to Earth with you people, on your ship."

"*Ten* of you? You can't possibly—"

"Don't worry about it, Cahann," said Harvey. "Your commander is deciding right now to bring us along."

They stopped at the edge of the meadow. In the distance, the procession was moving toward them.

How pompous they looked! Cahann had never noticed that before, how silly and pompous they all looked. Nor how completely defenseless.

"You can do it," he said in a low voice. He felt sick and frightened, but at the same time he was beginning to feel a kind of exultation. They would do it, they really would.

And was there any doubt the Earth would be a better world when they were finished with what they would do to it?

"Earth is out of step," said Harvey, "out of step with life. Like this group coming toward us. They're all out of step. We have to change that."

In the distance, the marching group all hopped at once, changing step.

—DONALD E. WESTLAKE

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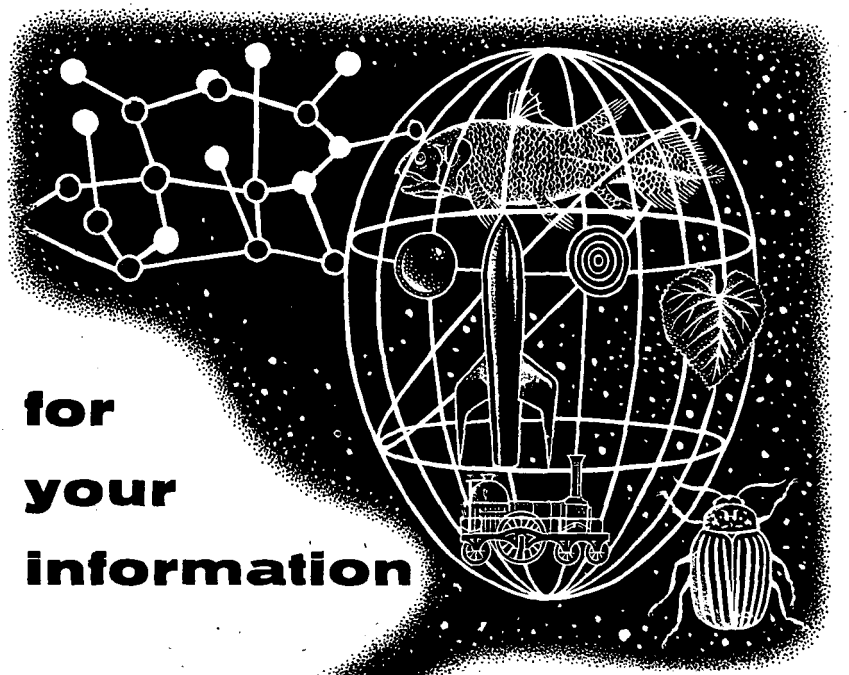

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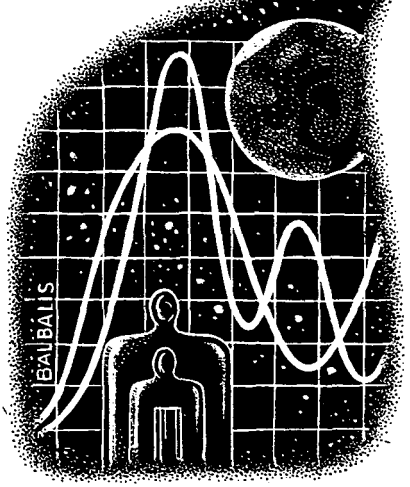

BY WILLY LEY

THE END OF THE JET AGE

A FEW years ago Arthur C. Clarke, having flown into New York from the West Coast by sleeper plane, said to me: "When I woke up this morning it suddenly occurred to me that I belong to the only generation of men who will take a real sleeper plane. The generation before us did not fly and the generation after us will fly so fast that there won't be any time for sleep."

It was a very interesting observation, which was wrong only

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in the respect of speaking of generations; it can all happen in the lifetime of one man. If somebody was born in 1900 he was walking around before anybody flew, except in balloons. This man might have flown in one of the early passenger planes which made it all the way from New York to Chicago in just a little over eight hours. He can now be flying in the Los Angeles-New York jet, which takes four hours and twenty minutes from lift-off in Los Angeles to touchdown on Idlewild airport. And the same man won't be too old, say five or six years from now, to board the successor to the jets.

The term "successor to the jets" must not be misunderstood. It does *not* mean that new types of transportation will make the jets disappear. Nothing ever seems to disappear completely. Soldiers not only carry bayonets but use them occasionally, whether there are transcontinental missiles or not.

THERE are two foreseeable types of devices which might be considered successors to the jets for passenger transportation. One is the ramjet, now in use for the propulsion of several different missiles. The other is the passenger-carrying rocket. Since we do have winged missiles which use ramjets for propulsion it would seem, at first glance, that the ramjet-powered passenger liner, flying at an average of twice the speed of sound, would be closer to the present. In a manner of speaking it is, but there is a problem — which is either interesting or infuriating, depending on how you look at it — in the fact that a ramjet will not work unless it is moving with a fairly high speed.

In the case of ramjet-powered missiles this is easily overcome by catapulting the missile into the air, either with a real catapult or else by the use of several high-power, short duration solid fuel rockets. As I said, this is being done with a missile; but when it comes to passenger carrying aircraft the passengers are likely to say something about this. In fact, the passenger's strongest argument would be to say nothing at all and book passage with another airline.

But the takeoff is not the only problem. The landing is another one. When an airliner approaches the airport area its speed is very considerably reduced. The final approach to the runway is made at about the speed where the wings will still keep it airborne. If such a plane were ramjet-propelled the ramjets just would not play any more.

The best statement about this problem I have ever heard was

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given after a lecture at New York University, right after the war, by Air Commodore Whittle, the man who designed the first British jet engines. When somebody from the audience asked him whether he thought the then new ramjet might ever be used for piloted aircraft (the questioner probably had military aircraft in mind) Commodore Whittle said that as an engineer he considered this an interesting problem. "But as a pilot," he continued, "I would hate to approach a runway with dead engines. This is the moment where I want to have all the power I might need — and if possible a little more."

Any ramjet-powered airliner would, therefore, need two sets of engines, adding turbojets for the take-off run and for getting the plane up to the speed it needs for the ramjets to take over. And the turbojets would be needed again for the landing.

And whenever you approach an engineer with the request of designing an airplane for two different sets of engines he will probably lean back as if in thought. He will be in thought, as a matter of fact, but he won't think about the problem. He'll think of a way of getting rid of you, and he may also consider whether there is anybody he dislikes enough to recommend for this job.

Even though a ramjet-powered airliner may look easier it is quite possible that a rocket-powered passenger liner is the more likely successor to today's jets. Years ago Dr. Walter Dornberger and Krafft A. Ehricke designed such an airliner — or more precisely they thought about the problem of how it could be made to work. In principle, the flight of such a rocket-powered airliner would be the same as the flight of a ballistic missile (in other words: it would not be really a "flight" in the proper meaning of the word most of the time) but with a landing at the end instead of an impact. When I mentioned this possibility at the time, the reaction of the listener usually was that he would let anybody else use this device.

But now, after successful manned orbits of the earth, the idea may slowly become more palatable.

As the diagram (Fig. 1) shows, the rocket-propelled passenger liner would be a two-stage device. Both stages would have wings and both stages would be piloted. But the wings of both stages would be used mainly for the landing. The passengers would be in the second stage.

TAKEOFF would be vertical or almost vertical, with all eight rocket motors burning (five in the first stage and three in the

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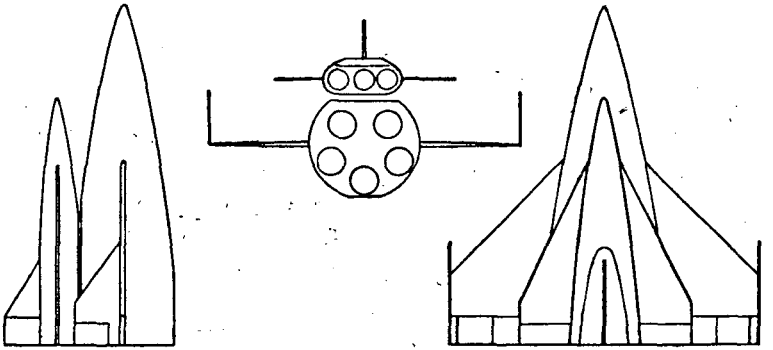

Fig. 1. Design for a two-stage, passenger-carrying rocket (both stages piloted).

second stage) to produce a maximum of thrust. But the three rocket motors of the second stage would *not* burn fuel from the tanks of the second stage during takeoff. They would take fuel from the first stage. The fuel supply of the first stage would be nearly exhausted after 130 seconds. Then the two stages would separate. The large, but by then very light, first stage would drop behind the second stage . . . which keeps going, this time using its own fuel. The job of the pilot of the first stage would be to fly his stage on the momentum it has and ease it around so that it will return to the airport from which it took off. Possibly he might fly it to another conveniently located airport; but the ideal would be to return to the original airport, so that the first stage, after inspection and refueling, can be used to push another second stage into its trajectory.

The second stage would meanwhile have gone into a ballistic trajectory, far flatter than the ballistic trajectories of missiles. The highest point of the flight would be around 28 miles up. It would actually be a flight in the upper stratosphere. For the sake of the passengers, one of the three rocket motors of the second stage would be kept burning at very much reduced thrust. The purpose is not to accelerate the ship any farther; the purpose is to spare the passengers from experiencing the zero-g condition, which is in itself harmless but might frighten inexperienced people. The low thrust of the rocket motor that is kept in operation would also help to overcome the residual air resistance which would still be encountered 28 miles up.

Each of the two stages would have some fuel left, to be used during the final approach to the

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runway for corrections and for an emergency pull-out in case a sudden obstruction appears on the runway.

The flying time from Los Angeles to New York would be only a few minutes more than one hour, or about one quarter of the time now needed by a turbojet.

The real problem here is the question "will it pay?" in all its ramifications. Will it pay for enough passengers to make a certain trip in one quarter of the time it normally takes them now? In the beginning the picture will no doubt be falsified by curiosity travelers, people who don't have to make the trip but have the money to pay for the ticket and make the trip for the sole purpose of bragging about it afterwards. Now, whether it will pay for the "real" travelers to quarter the travel time will depend, in a large measure, on the price of the ticket. Obviously if the ticket price is only 20 per cent higher than the jet fare, the quartering of the travel time will pay for many more people than it will if the ticket price is, say, double the jet fare.

The ticket price will depend, in turn, on the fuel consumption (and the price of the fuel) and on the number of trips a ship can make without needing a major overhaul. All these questions cannot be answered right now. The development cost of the ship itself will be influenced by how much it will differ from ships which the government will have to develop for space operations such as the job of supplying the space station or, possibly, the servicing of very large communications satellites.

But passenger travel by rocket is possible.

And it will come if the financial problems can economically be solved.

THE LIVING FOSSIL FROM CALIFORNIA.

Let me point out first that I have nothing against readers who ask me questions. But I do feel pleased when, once in a while, a reader tells me something. And I am especially pleased when a reader, as in this case Dr. Pedro Wygodzinsky, tells me something which I, without his kind intervention, would almost certainly have missed.

The case is the discovery of an insect which most certainly deserves the designation "living fossil" in northern California. The specific place, geographically speaking, was the northern California Coast Range in Mendocino County, near Piercy. The specific place, ecologically speaking, was under the decaying bark

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and in the rotten logs of fallen Douglas firs in this area.

The small insect that turned up in the collections made by Dr. W. Gertsch and V. Roth would have been recognized, in a general way, even by many city people. A "silverfish" they would have said, probably wondering what a silverfish was doing in a forest. As far as they are concerned, silverfish turn up in little-used closets, in old-fashioned pantries and sometimes in books — old books, that is. The reason why the book must be old is that the modern plastic glues now used in bookbinding hold no attraction for silverfish. They are interested in books bound with the aid of old-fashioned library paste, and in wallpaper stuck on with boiled flour paste.

Now the silverfish which the city man would have recognized has the scientific name of *Lepisma saccharina*, given by old Carolus Linnaeus himself. The first part of the name comes from the Greek *lepisma*, which means "scale" or else something that has scaled off. The second part of the name was to indicate that it loves sugar. Linnaeus probably was quite used to the spectacle of half a dozen silverfish darting off in as many directions when he reached for his sugar bowl.

They are primitive insects that do not have wings and do not

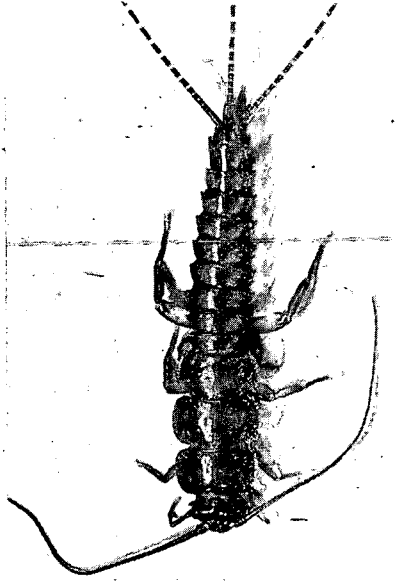

Fig. 2. Tricholepidion gertschi. From California. Photograph by Dr. Pedro Wygodzinsky.

go through a metamorphosis. Their young look like the adults; they are merely smaller. The name of the order of insects to which the silverfish belong is *Thysanura* or Bristletails. A total of about 300 species is known and there are, of course, several families. And to an expert who knows what to look for they do *not* look alike.

When Dr. Wygodzinsky — who at the time was on leave from his normal position in the Department of Zoology, University of Buenos Aires — looked at the insects brought back by Dr. Gertsch, he saw at once that they were *Thysanura*. But he also saw that they were not *Lepisma* but

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belonged to a different group. He did not write me in so many words that he grew suspicious, but that must have been the case for he set out on a collecting trip of his own for additional specimens. He was successful, too.

It looked like a new genus. But there was something familiar. Dr. Wygodzinsky remembered what it was, an insect very closely related to the one he had alive was known, but as a fossil. It was known as an inclusion in Baltic amber and had been described by F. Silvestri in 1912. The scientific name of the form preserved in amber became *Lepidothrix*, and the family of which it was the type was called *Lepidotrichidae*.

But these were fossils from the early part of the Oligocene period. The new insect from northern California was, therefore, a surviving representative of an otherwise extinct family of insects. It must be added here that, while the Thysanura as a whole are primitive insects, the Lepidotrichidae are the most archaic of the Thysanura.

That a genus of these archaic insects should have survived at all is remarkable. That it was found alive in California, while the extinct relatives were found in East Prussia, is almost to be expected. Old forms of animal and plant life very often turn up in widely separated places. The best known example is that of our opossum, a marsupial. Marsupials "normally" belong in Australia, but we have one in North America. The customary explanation for this phenomenon is that a group of animals (it applies to plants, too, of course) will, at one time in its history, occur over a very wide range and possibly be of worldwide distribution. But then the climate turns unfavorable in one area. The animal type disappears from that area — not necessarily because it is directly affected by the changing climate; it may be its food which disappears first. In another area natural enemies may become victorious, and as a consequence the type disappears from that area too. The final result is that the animal survives in a few spots . . . which might be at the extremes of its original range.

The very fact that occurrence is so scattered means something to the expert. If one should learn that a certain animal type is found on one of the northern Japanese islands, near Cape Town and in southern Sweden it is safe to bet that this is likely to be an old form.

That the new — or very old — insect from northern California should have extinct relatives in the Baltic amber was quite logical. Zoologists speak about a

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"relic fauna" when they come across such a case. The scientific name given to the new discovery is *Tricholepidion gertschi,* the second part of the name honoring its discoverer. The insect is, like all Thysanura, not large. Its body measures 12 millimeters in length when fully grown. The antennae are nine millimeters long and the three caudal appendages 14 millimeters. The total length, from the tip of the antennae to the tip of the appendages is, therefore, 35 millimeters or about 1.4 inches.

Of course there is no "practical" value to the discovery.

But there is a strange feeling of wonder that one finds around such a case.

I don't know how many people walk around in the forests of the California Coast Range. But even if it is not a place where hikers are common thousands of people must have wandered around there, completely unaware of what was hiding under the bark of the fallen logs on which they may have sat to rest. When hearing of such a case the next thought is always what else might be in hiding — or not even really hiding, but protected by not being recognized as something unusual by most people. And the thought after that is that such a relic might easily become extinct without even having been "discovered."

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

In a recent issue you supplied a list of the earliest known and therefore presumably largest asteroids. This list made me wonder about the nearest stars. I know, of course, that Alpha Centauri is the nearest star but it is not visible from New Jersey where I live. Which is the nearest star I can see from my home in New Jersey?

Dorothy Steinfeld,
East Orange, N. J.

The nearest star you can see from New Jersey is the one commonly known as the Sun. Alpha Centauri is only the second nearest star, after our sun. Having gotten this customary correction off my chest I can proceed to answer what you really meant. The nearest naked-eye star that can be seen from the northern hemisphere also happens to be the brightest: Sirius. It is very interesting that many of the brightest stars are quite a distance away from us: Pollux 30 light years, Capella 48 light years, Aldebaran 57 light years, Arcturus 38 light years and Regulus 80 light years. On the other hand the nearest stars are by no means the brightest, as the following table shows:

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Name or Designation	Distance in Light Years	Magnitude
Proxima Centauri	4	11.0
Alpha Centauri	4	0.1
Barnard's Star	6	9.7
Wolf 359	8	13.5
Luyten 726-8	8	12.5
Lalande Catalogue No. 21,185	8	7.6
Sirius	9	−1.6
Procyon	11	1.0

As you can see, only three (Alpha Centauri, Sirius and Procyon) of the eight nearest stars are even visible with the naked eye. But these three happen to be quite bright.

Please tell me why we need communications satellites. We have long-range radio, we have cables, we even have telephone cables. What can these communications satellites do that radio, cables and telephone cables cannot do?

Andrew Pessowski
Chicago 51, Ill.

Offhand the communications satellites, especially the first series of them, will not be able to do anything that cables, especially telephone cables, can not do. They can do better than long-range radio, which is sometimes disturbed by the cosmic events which are usually dubbed "magnetic storms." The wavelengths used by the satellites will not be subject to such disturbances. But even the first batch of "comsats," as they are now called, will do something all businessmen are looking forward to. They will add new channels. Consider: if a New York company has a branch office in London, or vice versa, their office hours overlap by just two hours. All business which concerns both must be transacted in these two hours, and everybody scrambles for this two-hour slot. If the English firm has a branch office in your city, Chicago, the office hour overlap will be just one hour. There is one more factor which nobody mentions much because it is difficult to give figures, but "comsats" will be cheaper then additional cables. Besides cables don't go everywhere. The satellite shortwave does.

I read just recently that some of our artificial satellites are expected to stay in orbit for 50 or 100 or even more years. How is this possible? Aren't they all inside Roche's limit? Why don't they break up? Or has Roche's limit been disproved?

Arthur T. A. Wallace
The Bronx 53, N. Y.

There is hardly any concept

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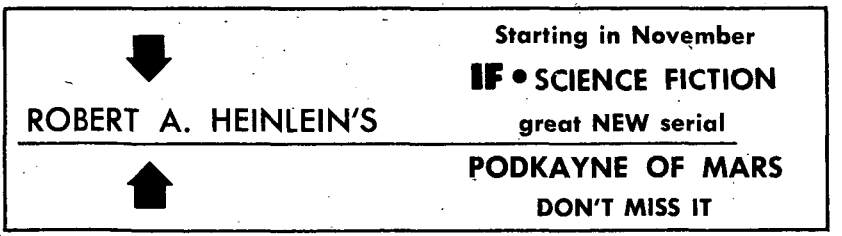
that has been as much misunderstood than "Roche's Limit" and is as popular at the same time. I get an average of one letter per week which either asks about it or else quotes it. Roche's limit is always interpreted to mean that no satellite can exist inside this limit which Edouard Roche, Professor of Mathematics at Montpellier, France, placed at 2.44 planet radii, counting from the center of the planet. In the case of the earth this means that Roche's limit is about 5700 miles from sea level. This means, in turn, that all artificial satellites are well inside Roche's limit. Then why don't they break up, as reader Wallace asks? Awfully simple; Professor Roche specified that his "limit" applied to *fluid* satellites, satellites of zero tensile strength. Any solid body, like a large meteoroid, or any structure, like any artificial satellite, is not troubled by Roche's limit at all.

— WILLY LEY

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FORECAST

With this issue GALAXY begins its thirteenth year, and as our birthday present to all of us we've lined up some old favorites among the authors to bring us new favorite stories. Next issue we have a novella by a fellow who has been with us since Volume 1 Number 1, and almost two dozen times since. The name is Fritz Leiber. The story is *The Creature from Cleveland Depths*. Like all of Leiber's best work, this one is bright and witty, with savage undertones. It has to do with shelters and cybernetics, but most of all it has to do with people — people who are capable of smashing themselves against their own dangerous ingenuity; people who can then pick up the pieces and build something better . . . people you will be glad to meet.



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A CITY NEAR CENTAURUS

The city was sacred, but not to its gods. Michaelson was a god — but far from sacred!

Illustrated by WEST

By BILL DOEDE

CROUCHED in the ancient doorway like an animal peering out from his burrow, Mr. Michaelson saw the native.

At first he was startled, thinking it might be someone else from the Earth settlement who had discovered the old city before him. Then he saw the glint of sun against the metallic skirt, and relaxed.

He chuckled to himself, wondering with amusement what a webfooted man was doing in an old dead city so far from his people. Some facts were known about the people of Alpha Centaurus II. They were not actually natives, he recalled. They were a colony from the fifth planet of the system. They were a curious people. Some were highly intelligent, though uneducated.

He decided to ignore the man for the moment. He was far down the ancient street, a mere speck against the sand. There would be plenty of time to wonder about him.

He gazed out from his position at the complex variety of buildings before him. Some were small, obviously homes. Others were huge with tall, frail spires standing against the pale blue sky. Square buildings, ellipsoid, spheroid. Beautiful, dream-stuff bridges connected tall, conical towers, bridges that still swung in the wind after half a million years. Late afternoon sunlight shone against ebony surfaces. The sands of many centuries had blown down the wide streets and filled the doorways. Desert plants grew from roofs of smaller buildings.

Ignoring the native, Mr. Michaelson poked about among

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the ruins happily, exclaiming to himself about some particular artifact, marveling at its state of preservation, holding it this way and that to catch the late afternoon sun, smiling, clucking gleefully. He crawled over the rubble through old doorways half filled with the accumulation of ages. He dug experimentally in the sand with his hands, like a dog, under a roof that had weathered half a million years of rain and sun. Then he crawled out again, covered with dust and cobwebs.

THE native stood in the street less than a hundred feet away, waving his arms madly. "Mr. Earthgod" he cried. "It is sacred ground where you are trespassing!"

The archeologist smiled, watching the man hurry closer. He was short, even for a native. Long gray hair hung to his shoulders, bobbing up and down as he walked. He wore no shoes. The toes of his webbed feet dragged in the sand, making a deep trail behind him. He was an old man.

"You never told us about this old dead city," Michaelson said, chidingly. "Shame on you. But never mind. I've found it now. Isn't it beautiful?"

"Yes, beautiful. You will leave now."

"Leave?" Michaelson asked, acting surprised as if the man were a child. "I just got here a few hours ago."

"You must go."

"Why? Who are you?"

"I am keeper of the city."

"You?" Michaelson laughed. Then, seeing how serious the native was, said, "What makes you think a dead city needs a keeper?"

"The spirits may return."

Michaelson crawled out of the doorway and stood up. He brushed his trousers. He pointed. "See that wall? Built of some metal, I'd say, some alloy impervious to rust and wear."

"The spirits are angry."

"Notice the inscriptions? Wind has blown sand against them for eons, and rain and sleet. But their story is there, once we decipher it."

"Leave!"

The native's lined, weathered old face was working around the mouth in anger. Michaelson was almost sorry he had mocked him. He was deadly serious.

"Look," he said. "No spirits are ever coming back here. Don't you know that? And even if they did, spirits care nothing for old cities half covered with sand and dirt."

He walked away from the old man, heading for another building. The sun had already gone below the horizon, coloring the high clouds. He glanced backward. The webfoot was following.

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"Mr. Earthgod!" the webfoot cried, so sharply that Michaelson stopped. "You must not touch, not walk upon, not handle. Your step may destroy the home of some ancient spirit. Your breath may cause one iota of change and a spirit may lose his way in the darkness. Go quickly now, or be killed."

HE turned and walked off, not looking back.

Michaelson stood in the ancient street, tall, gaunt, feet planted wide, hands in pockets, watching the webfoot until he was out of sight beyond a huge circular building. There was a man to watch. There was one of the intelligent ones. One look into the alert old eyes had told him that.

Michaelson shook his head, and went about satisfying his curiosity. He entered buildings without thought of roofs falling in, or decayed floors dropping from under his weight. He began to collect small items, making a pile of them in the street. An ancient bowl, metal untouched by the ages. A statue of a man, one foot high, correct to the minutest detail, showing how identical they had been to Earthmen. He found books still standing on ancient shelves but was afraid to touch them without tools.

Darkness came swiftly and he was forced out into the street.

He stood there alone feeling the age of the place. Even the smell of age was in the air. Silver moonlight from the two moons filtered through clear air down upon the ruins. The city lay now in darkness, dead and still, waiting for morning so it could lie dead and still in the sun.

There was no hurry to be going home, although he was alone, although this was Alpha Centaurus II with many unknowns, many dangers . . . although home was a very great distance away. There was no one back there to worry about him.

His wife had died many years ago back on Earth. No children. His friends in the settlement would not look for him for another day at least. Anyway, the tiny cylinder, buried in flesh behind his ear, a thing of mystery and immense power, could take him home instantly, without effort save a flicker of thought.

"You did not leave, as I asked you."

Michaelson whirled around at the sound of the native's voice. Then he relaxed. He said, "You shouldn't sneak up on a man like that."

"You must leave, or I will be forced to kill you. I do not want to kill you, but if I must . . ." He made a clucking sound deep in the throat. "The spirits are angry."

"Nonsense. Superstition! But

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never mind. You have been here longer than I. Tell me, what are those instruments in the rooms? It looks like a clock but I'm certain it had some other function."

"What rooms?"

"Oh, come now. The small rooms back there. Look like they were bedrooms."

"I do not know." The webfoot drew closer. Michaelson decided he was sixty or seventy years old, at least.

"You've been here a long time. You are intelligent, and you must be educated, the way you talk. That gadget looks like a timepiece of some sort. What is it? What does it measure?"

"I insist that you go." The webfoot held something in his hand.

"No." Michaelson looked off down the street, trying to ignore the native, trying to feel the life of the city as it might have been.

"YOU ARE sensitive," the native said in his ear. "It takes a sensitive god to feel the spirits moving in the houses and walking in these old streets."

"Say it any way you want to. This is the most fascinating thing I've ever seen. The Inca's treasure, the ruins of Pompeii, Egyptian tombs — none can hold a candle to this."

"Mr. Earthgod . . ."

"Don't call me that. I'm not a god, and you know it."

The old man shrugged. "It is not an item worthy of dispute. Those names you mention, are they the names of gods?"

He chuckled. "In a way, yes. What is your name?"

"Maota."

"You must help me, Maota. These things must be preserved. We'll build a museum, right here in the street. No, over there on the hill just outside the city. We'll collect all the old writings and perhaps we may decipher them. Think of it, Maota! To read pages written so long ago and think their thoughts. We'll put everything under glass. Build and evacuate chambers to stop the decay. Catalogue, itemize . . ."

Michaelson was warming up to his subject, but Maota shook his head like a waving palm frond and stamped his feet.

"You will leave now."

"Can't you see? Look at the decay. These things are priceless. They must be preserved. Future generations will thank us."

"Do you mean," the old man asked, aghast, "that you want others to come here? You know the city abhors the sound of alien voices. Those who lived here may return one day! They must not find their city packaged and preserved and laid out on shelves for the curious to breathe their foul breaths upon. You will leave. Now!"

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"No." Michaelson was adamant. The rock of Gibraltar.

Maota hit him, quickly, passionately, and dropped the weapon beside his body. He turned swiftly, making a swirling mark in the sand with his heel, and walked off toward the hills outside the city.

The weapon he had used was an ancient book. Its paper-thin pages rustled in the wind as if an unseen hand turned them, reading, while Michaelson's blood trickled out from the head wound upon the ancient street.

WHEN he regained consciousness the two moons, bright sentinel orbs in the night sky, had moved to a new position down their sliding path. Old Maota's absence took some of the weirdness and fantasy away. It seemed a more practical place now.

The gash in his head was painful, throbbing with quick, short hammer-blows synchronized with his heart beats. But there was a new determination in him. If it was a fight that the old webfooted fool wanted, a fight he would get. The cylinder flicked him, at his command, across five hundred miles of desert and rocks to a small creek he remembered. Here he bathed his head in cool water until all the caked blood was dissolved from his hair. Feeling better, he went back.

The wind had turned cool. Michaelson shivered, wishing he had brought a coat. The city was absolutely still except for small gusts of wind sighing through the frail spires. The ancient book still lay in the sand beside the dark spot of blood. He stooped over and picked it up.

It was light, much lighter than most Earth books. He ran a hand over the binding. Smooth it was, untouched by time or climate. He squinted at the pages, tilting the book to catch the bright moonlight, but the writing was alien. He touched the page, ran his forefinger over the writing.

Suddenly he sprang back. The book fell from his hands.

"God in heaven!" he exclaimed.

He had heard a voice. He looked around at the old buildings, down the length of the ancient street. Something strange about the voice. Not Maota. Not his tones. Not his words. Satisfied that no one was near, he stooped and picked up the book again.

"Good God!" he said aloud. It was the book talking. His fingers had touched the writing again. It was not a voice, exactly, but a stirring in his mind, like a strange language heard for the first time.

A talking book. What other surprises were in the city? Tall, fragile buildings laughing at time and weather. A clock measuring God-knows-what. If such wonders

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remained, what about those already destroyed? One could only guess at the machines, the gadgets, the artistry already decayed and blown away to mix forever with the sand.

I must preserve it, he thought, whether Maota likes it or not. They say these people lived half a million years ago. A long time. Let's see, now. A man lives one hundred years on the average. Five thousand lifetimes.

And all you do is touch a book, and a voice jumps across all those years!

He started off toward the tall building he had examined upon discovery of the city. His left eyelid began to twitch and he laid his forefinger against the eye, pressing until it stopped. Then he stooped and entered the building. He laid the book down and tried to take the "clock" off the wall. It was dark in the building and his fingers felt along the wall, looking for it. Then he touched it. His fingers moved over its smooth surface. Then suddenly he jerked his hand back with an exclamation of amazement. Fear ran up his spine.

The clock was warm.

He felt like running, like flicking back to the settlement where there were people and familiar voics, for here was a thing that should not be. Half a million years — and here was warmth!

He touched it again, curiosity overwhelming his fear. It *was* warm. No mistake. And there was a faint vibration, a suggestion of power. He stood there in the darkness staring off into the darkness, trembling. Fear built up in him until it was a monstrous thing, drowning reason. He forgot the power of the cylinder behind his ear. He scrambled through the doorway. He got up and ran down the ancient sandy street until he came to the edge of the city. Here he stopped, gasping for air, feeling the pain throb in his head.

Common sense said that he should go home, that nothing worthwhile could be accomplished at night, that he was tired, that he was weak from loss of blood and fright and running. But when Michaelson was on the trail of important discoveries he had no common sense.

He sat down in the darkness, meaning to rest a moment.

WHEN he awoke dawn was red against thin clouds in the east.

Old Maota stood in the street with webbed feet planted far apart in the sand, a weapon in the crook of his arm. It was a long tube affair, familiar to Michaelson.

Michaelson asked, "Did you sleep well?"

"No."

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"I'm sorry to hear that."

"How do you feel?"

"Fine, but my head aches a little."

"Sorry," Maota said.

"For what?"

"For hitting you. Pain is not for gods like you."

Michaelson relaxed somewhat. "What kind of man are you? First you try to break my skull, then you apologize."

"I abhor pain. I should have killed you outright."

He thought about that for a moment, eyeing the weapon.

It looked in good working order. Slim and shiny and innocent, it looked like a glorified African blowgun. But he was not deceived by its appearance. It was a deadly weapon.

"Well," he said, "before you kill me, tell me about the book." He held it up for Maota to see.

"What about the book?"

"What kind of book is it?"

"What does Mr. Earthgod mean, what *kind* of book? You have seen it. It is like any other book, except for the material and the fact that it talks."

"No, no. I mean, what's in it?"

"Poetry."

"Poetry? For God's sake, why poetry? Why not mathematics or history? Why not tell how to make the metal of the book itself? Now there is a subject worthy of a book."

Maota shook his head. "One does not study a dead culture to learn how they made things, but how they thought. But we are wasting time. I must kill you now, so I can get some rest."

The old man raised the gun.

"WAIT! You forget that I also have a weapon." He pointed to the spot behind his ear where the cylinder was buried. "I can move faster than you can fire the gun."

Maota nodded. "I have heard how you travel. It does not matter. I will kill you anyway."

"I suggest we negotiate."

"No."

"Why not?"

Maota looked off toward the hills, old eyes filmed from years of sand and wind, leather skin lined and pitted. The hills stood immobile, brown-gray, already shimmering with heat, impotent.

"Why not?" Michaelson repeated.

"Why not what?" Maota dragged his eyes back.

"Negotiate."

"No." Maota's eyes grew hard as steel. They stood there in the sun, not twenty feet apart, hating each other. The two moons, very pale and far away on the western horizon, stared like two bottomless eyes.

"All right, then. At least it's a quick death. I hear that thing just

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disintegrates a man. Pfft! And that's that."

Michaelson prepared himself to move if the old man's finger slid closer toward the firing stud. The old man raised the gun.

"Wait!"

"Now what?"

"At least read some of the book to me before I die, then."

The gun wavered. "I am not an unreasonable man," the webfoot said.

Michaelson stepped forward, extending his arm with the book.

"No, stay where you are. Throw it."

"This book is priceless. You just don't go throwing such valuable items around."

"It won't break. Throw it."

Michaelson threw the book. It

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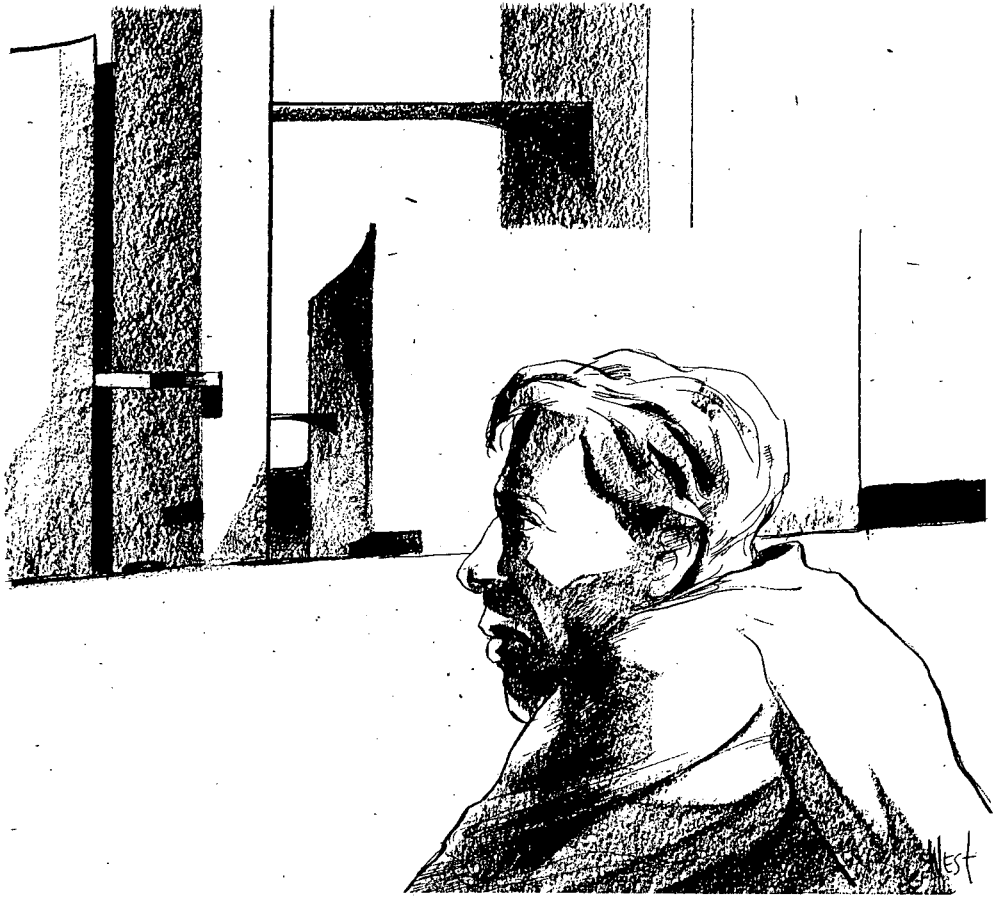

landed at Maota's feet, spouting sand against his leg. He shifted the weapon, picked up the book and leafed through it, raising his head in a listening attitude, searching for a suitable passage. Michaelson heard the thin, metallic pages rustle softly. He could have jumped and seized the weapon at that moment, but his desire to hear the book was strong.

OLD Maota read, Michaelson listened. The cadence was different, the syntax confusing. But the thoughts were there. It might have been a professor back on Earth reading to his students. Keats, Shelley, Browning. These people were human, with human thoughts and aspirations.

The old man stopped reading. He squatted slowly, keeping

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Michaelson in sight, and laid the book face up in the sand. Wind moved the pages.

"See?" he said. "The spirits read. They must have been great readers, these people. They drink the book, as if it were an elixir. See how gentle! They lap at the pages like a new kitten tasting milk."

Michaelson laughed. "You certainly have an imagination."

"What difference does it make?" Maota cried, suddenly angry. "You want to close up all these things in boxes for a posterity who may have no slightest feeling or appreciation. I want to leave the city as it is, for spirits whose existence I cannot prove."

The old man's eyes were furious now, deadly. The gun came down directly in line with the Earthman's chest. The gnarled finger moved.

Michaelson, using the power of the cylinder behind his ear, jumped behind the old webfoot. To Maota it seemed that he had flicked out of existence like a match blown out. The next instant Michaelson spun him around and hit him. It was an inexpert fist, belonging to an archeologist, not a fighter. But Maota was an old man.

He dropped in the sand, momentarily stunned. Michaelson bent over to pick up the gun and the old man, feeling it slip from his fingers, hung on and was pulled to his feet.

They struggled for possession of the gun, silently, gasping, kicking sand. Faces grew red. Lips drew back over Michaelson's white teeth, over Maota's pink, toothless gums. The dead city's fragile spires threw impersonal shadows down where they fought.

Then quite suddenly a finger or hand—neither knew whose finger or hand—touched the firing stud.

There was a hollow, whooshing sound. Both stopped still, realizing the total destruction they might have caused.

"It only hit the ground," Michaelson said.

A black, charred hole, two feet in diameter and — they could not see how deep — stared at them.

Maota let go and sprawled in the sand. "The book!" he cried. "The book is gone!"

"No! We probably covered it with sand while we fought."

BOTH men began scooping sand in their cupped hands, digging frantically for the book. Saliva dripped from Maota's mouth, but he didn't know or care.

Finally they stopped, exhausted. They had covered a substantial area around the hole. They had covered the complete area where they had been.

"We killed it," the old man moaned.

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"It was just a book. Not alive, you know."

"How do you know?" The old man's pale eyes were filled with tears. "It talked and it sang. In a way, it had a soul. Sometimes on long nights I used to imagine it loved me, for taking care of it."

"There are other books. We'll get another."

Maota shook his head. "There are no more."

"But I've seen them. Down there in the square building."

"Not poetry. Books, yes, but not poetry. That was the only book with songs."

"I'm sorry."

"*You* killed it!" Maota suddenly sprang for the weapon, lying forgotten in the sand. Michaelson put his foot on it and Maota was too weak to tear it loose. He could only weep out his rage.

When he could talk again, Maota said, "I am sorry, Mr. Earthgod. I've disgraced myself."

"Don't be sorry." Michaelson helped him to his feet. "We fight for some reasons, cry for others. A priceless book is a good reason for either."

"Not for that. For not winning. I should have killed you last night when I had the chance. The gods give us chances and if we don't take them we lose forever."

"I told you before! We are on the same side. Negotiate. Have you never heard of negotiation?"

"You are a god," Maota said. "One does not negotiate with gods. One either loves them, or kills them."

"That's another thing. I am not a god. Can't you understand?"

"Of course you are." Maota looked up, very sure. "Mortals cannot step from star to star like crossing a shallow brook."

"No, no. I don't step from one star to another. An invention does that. Just an invention. I carry it with me. It's a tiny thing. No one would ever guess it has such power. So you see, I'm human, just like you. Hit me and I hurt. Cut me and I bleed. I love. I hate. I was born. Some day I'll die. See? I'm human. Just a human with a machine. No more than that."

MAOTA laughed, then sobered quickly. "You lie."

"No."

"If I had this machine, could I travel as you?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll kill you and take yours."

"It would not work for you."

"Why?"

"Each machine is tailored for each person."

The old man hung his head. He looked down into the black, charred hole. He walked all around the hole. He kicked at the sand, looking half-heartedly again for the book.

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"Look," Michaelson said. "I'm sure I've convinced you that I'm human. Why not have a try at negotiating our differences?"

He looked up. His expressive eyes, deep, resigned, studied Michaelson's face. Finally he shook his head sadly. "When we first met I hoped we could think the ancient thoughts together. But our paths diverge. We have finished, you and I."

He turned and started off, shoulders slumped dejectedly.

Michaelson caught up to him. "Are you leaving the city?"

"No."

"Where are you going?"

"Away. Far away." Maota looked off toward the hills, eyes distant.

"Don't be stupid, old man. How can you go far away and not leave the city?"

"There are many directions. You would not understand."

"East. West. North. South. Up. Down."

"No, no. There is another direction. Come, if you must see."

Michaelson followed him far down the street. They came to a section of the city he had not seen before. Buildings were smaller, spires dwarfed against larger structures. Here a path was packed in the sand, leading to a particular building.

Michaelson said, "This is where you live?"

"Yes."

Maota went inside. Michaelson stood in the entrance and looked around. The room was clean, furnished with hand made chairs and a bed. Who is this old man, he thought, far from his people, living alone, choosing a life of solitude among ancient ruins but not touching them? Above the bed a "clock" was fastened to the wall. Michaelson remembered his fright — thinking of the warmth where warmth should not be.

Maota pointed to it.

"You asked about this machine," he said. "Now I will tell you." He laid his hand against it. "Here is power to follow another direction."

MICHAELSON tested one of the chairs to see if it would hold his weight, then sat down. His curiosity about the instrument was colossal, but he forced a short laugh. "Maota, you *are* complex. Why not stop all this mystery nonsense and tell me about it? You know more about it than I."

"Of course." Maota smiled a toothless, superior smile. "What do you suppose happened to this race?"

"You tell me."

"They took the unknown direction. The books speak of it. I don't know how the instrument works, but one thing is certain. The race

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did not die out, as a species becomes extinct."

Michaelson was amused, but interested. "Something like a fourth dimension?"

"I don't know. I only know that with this instrument there is no death. I have read the books that speak of this race, this wonderful people who conquered all disease, who explored all the mysteries of science, who devised this machine to cheat death. See this button here on the face of the instrument? Press the button, and . . ."

"And what?"

"I don't know, exactly. But I have lived many years. I have walked the streets of this city and wondered, and wanted to press the button. Now I will do so."

Quickly the old man, still smiling, pressed the button. A high-pitched whine filled the air, just within audio range. Steady for a moment, it then rose in pitch passing beyond hearing quickly.

The old man's knees buckled. He sank down, fell over the bed, lay still. Michaelson touched him cautiously, then examined him more carefully. No question about it.

The old man was dead.

FEELING depressed and alone, Michaelson found a desert knoll outside the city overlooking the tall spires that shone in the sunlight and gleamed in the moonlight. He made a stretcher, rolled the old man's body on to it and dragged it down the long ancient street and up the knoll.

Here he buried him.

But it seemed a waste of time. Somehow he knew beyond any doubt that the old native and his body were completely disassociated in some sense more complete than death.

In the days that followed he gave much thought to the "clock." He came to the city every day. He spent long hours in the huge square building with the books. He learned the language by sheer bulldog determination. Then he searched the books for information about the instrument.

Finally after many weeks, long after the winds had obliterated all evidence of Maota's grave on the knoll, Michaelson made a decision. He had to know if the machine would work for him.

And so one afternoon when the ancient spires threw long shadows over the sand he walked down the long street and entered the old man's house. He stood before the instrument, trembling, afraid, but determined. He pinched his eyes shut tight like a child and pressed the button.

The high-pitched whine started.

Complete, utter silence. Void. Darkness. Awareness and memory, yes; nothing else. Then Maota's chuckle came. No sound,

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an impression only like the voice from the ancient book. Where was he? There was no left or right, up or down. Maota was everywhere, nowhere.

"Look!" Maota's thought was directed at him in this place of no direction. "Think of the city and you will see it."

Michaelson did, and he saw the city beyond, as if he were looking through a window. And yet he was in the city looking at his own body.

Maota's chuckle again. "The city will remain as it is. You did not win after all."

"Neither did you."

"But this existence has compensations," Maota said. "You can be anywhere, see anywhere on this planet. Even on your Earth."

Michaelson felt a great sadness, seeing his body lying across the old, home made bed. He looked closer. He sensed a vibration or life force — he didn't stop to define it — in his body. Why was his dead body different from Old Maota's? Could it be that there was some thread stretching from the reality of his body to his present state?

"I don't like your thoughts," Maota said. "No one can go back. I tried. I have discussed it with many who are not presently in communication with you. No one can go back."

Michaelson decided he would try.

"NO!" Maota's thought was prickled with fear and anger.

Michaelson did not know how to try, but he remembered the cylinder and gathered all the force of his mind in spite of Maota's protests, and gave his most violent command.

At first he thought it didn't work. He got up and looked around, then it struck him. *He was standing up!*

The cylinder. He knew it was the cylinder. That was the difference between himself and Maota. When he used the cylinder, that was where he went, the place where Maota was now. It was a door of some kind, leading to a path of some kind where distance was non-existent. But the "clock" was a mechanism to transport only the mind to that place.

To be certain of it, he pressed the button again, with the same result as before. He saw his own body fall down. He felt Maota's presence.

"You devil!" Maota's thought-scream was a sword of hate and anger, irrational suddenly, like a person who knows his loss is irrevocable. "I said you were a god. I said you were a god. *I said you were a god . . . !*"

— BILL DOEDE

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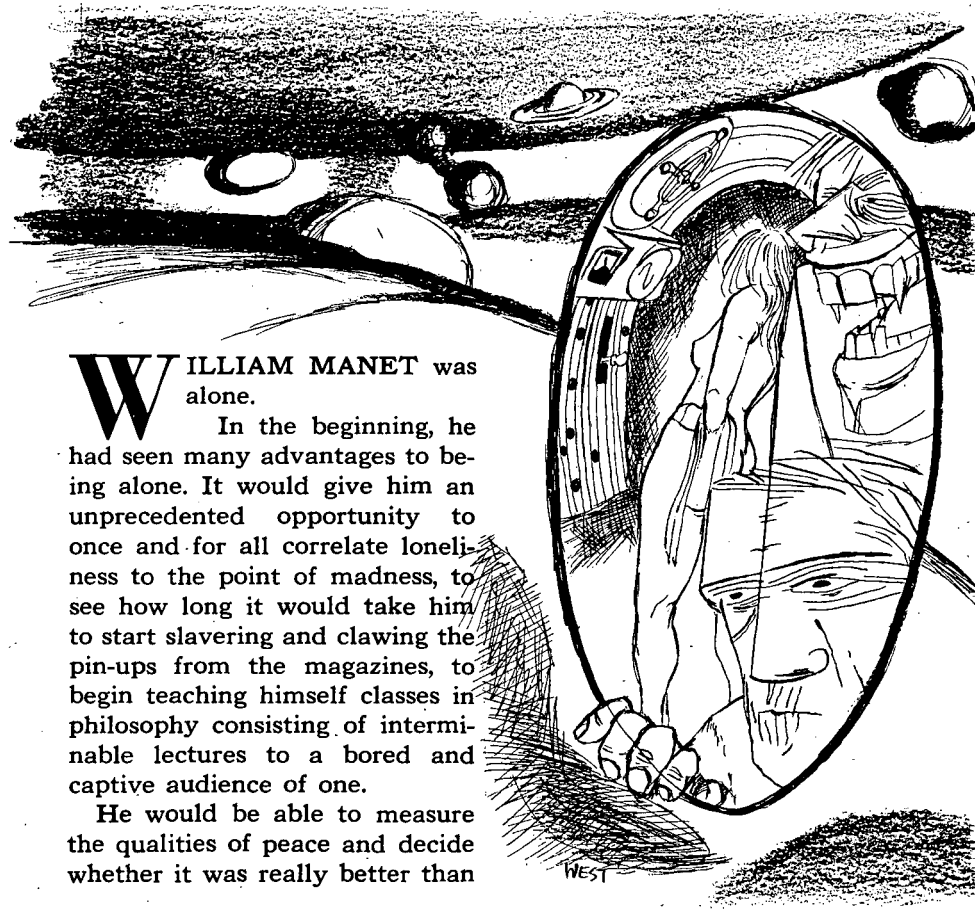
By JIM HARMON

Illustrated by WEST

Every lonely man tries to make friends. Manet just didn't know when to stop!

HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS



WILLIAM MANET was alone.

In the beginning, he had seen many advantages to being alone. It would give him an unprecedented opportunity to once and for all correlate loneliness to the point of madness, to see how long it would take him to start slavering and clawing the pin-ups from the magazines, to begin teaching himself classes in philosophy consisting of interminable lectures to a bored and captive audience of one.

He would be able to measure the qualities of peace and decide whether it was really better than

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war, he would be able to get as fat and as dirty as he liked, he would be able to live more like an animal and think more like a god than any man for generations.

But after a shorter time than he expected, it all got to be a tearing bore. Even the waiting to go crazy part of it.

Not that he was going to have any great long wait of it. He was already talking to himself, making verbal notes for his lectures, and he had cut out a picture of Annie Oakley from an old book. He tacked it up and winked at it whenever he passed that way.

Lately she was winking back at him.

Loneliness was a physical weight on his skull. It peeled the flesh from his arms and legs and sandpapered his self-pity to a fine sensitivity.

No one on Earth was as lonely as William Manet, and even William Manet could only be this lonely on Mars.

Manet was Atmosphere Seeder Station 131-47's own human.

All Manet had to do was sit in the beating aluminum heart in the middle of the chalk desert and stare out, chin cupped in hands, at the flat, flat pavement of dirty talcum, at the stars gleaming as hard in the black sky as a starlet's capped teeth . . . stars two of which were moons and one of which was Earth. He had to do nothing else. The whole gimcrack was cybernetically controlled, entirely automatic. No one was needed here — no human being, at least.

The Workers' Union was a pretty small pressure group, but it didn't take much to pressure the Assembly. Featherbedding had been carefully specified, including an Overseer for each of the Seeders to honeycomb Mars, to prepare its atmosphere for colonization.

They didn't give tests to find well-balanced, well-integrated people for the job. Well-balanced, well-integrated men weren't going to isolate themselves in a useless job. They got, instead, William Manet and his fellows.

The Overseers were to stay as long as the job required. Passenger fare to Mars was about one billion dollars. They weren't providing commuter service for night shifts. They weren't providing accommodations for couples when the law specified only one occupant. They weren't providing fuel (at fifty million dollars a gallon) for visits between the various Overseers. They weren't very providential.

But it was two hundred thousand a year in salary, and it offered wonderful opportunities.

It gave William Manet an opportunity to think he saw a spaceship making a tailfirst land-

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ing on the table of the desert, its tail burning as bright as envy.

MANET suspected hallucination, but in an existence with all the pallid dispassion of a requited love he was happy to welcome dementia. Sometimes he even manufactured it. Sometimes he would run through the arteries of the factory and play that it had suddenly gone mad hating human beings, and was about to close down its bulkheads on him as sure as the Engineers' Thumb and bale up the pressure-dehydrated digest, making so much stall flooring of him. He ran until he dropped with a kind of climaxing release of terror.

So Manet put on the pressure suit he had been given because he would never need it, and marched out to meet the visiting spaceship.

He wasn't quite clear how he came from walking effortlessly across the Martian plain that had all the distance-perpetuating qualities of a kid's crank movie machine to the comfortable interior of a strange cabin. Not a ship's cabin but a Northwoods cabin.

The black and orange Hallowe'en log charring in the slate stone fireplace seemed real. So did the lean man with the smiling mustache painted with the random designs of the fire, standing before the horizontal pattern of chinked wall.

"Need a fresher?" the host inquired.

Manet's eyes wondered down to heavy water tumbler full of rich, amber whiskey full of sparks from the hearth. He stirred himself in the comfortingly warm leather chair. "No, no, I'm *fine*." He let the word hang there for examination. "Pardon me, but could you tell me just what place this is?"

The host shrugged. It was the only word for it. "Whatever place you choose it to be, so long as you're with Trader Tom. 'Service,' that's my motto. It is a way of life with me."

"Trader Tom? Service?"

"Yes! That's it exactly. It's *me* exactly. Trader Tom Service — Serving the Wants of the Spaceman Between the Stars. Of course, 'stars' is poetic. Any point of light in the sky in a star. We service the planets."

Manet took the tumbler in both hands and drank. It was good whiskey, immensely powerful. "The government wouldn't pay for somebody serving the wants of spacemen," he exploded.

"Ah," Trader Tom said, cautionary. He moved nearer the fire and warmed his hands and buttocks. "Ah, but I am not a *government* service. I represent free enterprise."

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"NONSENSE," Manet said. "No group of private individuals can build a spaceship. It takes a combine of nations."

"But remember only that businessmen are reactionary. It's well-known. Ask anyone on the street. Businessmen are reactionary even beyond the capitalistic system. Money is a fiction that exists mostly on paper. They play along on paper to get paper things, but to get real things they can forego the papers. Comprehend, *mon ami*? My businessmen have gone back to the barter system. Between them, they have the raw materials, the trained men, the man-hours to make a spaceship. So they make it. Damned reactionaries, all of my principals."

"I don't believe you," Manet stated flatly. His conversation had grown blunt with disuse. "What possible profit could your principals turn from running a trading ship among scattered exploration posts on the planets? What could you give us that a benevolent government doesn't already supply us with? And if there was anything, how could we pay for it? My year's salary wouldn't cover the transportation costs of this glass of whiskey."

"Do you find it good whiskey?"

"Very good."

"Excellent?"

"Excellent, if you prefer."

"I only meant — but never mind. We give you what you want. As for paying for it — why, forget about the payment. You may apply for a Trader Tom Credit Card."

"And I could buy anything that I wanted with it?" Manet demanded. "That's absurd. I'd never be able to pay for it."

"That's it precisely!" Trader Tom said with enthusiasm. "You *never* pay for it. Charges are merely deducted from your *estate*."

"But I may leave no estate!"

Trader Tom demonstrated his peculiar shrug. "All businesses operate on a certain margin of risk. That is our worry."

MANET finished the mellow whiskey and looked into the glass. It seemed to have been polished clean. "What do you have to offer?"

"Whatever you want?"

Irritably, "How do I know what I want until I know what you have?"

"You know."

"I know? All right, I know. You don't have it for sale."

"Old chap, understand if you please that I do not only *sell*. I am a trader — Trader Tom. I trade with many parties. There are, for example . . . extraterrestrials."

"Folk legend!"

"On the contrary, *mon cher*,

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the only reality it lacks is political reality. The Assembly could no longer justify their disposition of the cosmos if it were known they were dealing confiscation without representation. Come, tell me what you want."

Manet gave in to it. "I want to be not alone," he said.

"Of course," Trader Tom replied, "I suspected. It is not so unusual, you know. Sign here. And here. Two copies. This is yours. Thank you so much."

Manet handed back the pen and stared at the laminated card in his hand.

TRADER TOM CREDIT CARD

Good for Anything

A-1 9*8*7*6*5*4*3*2***

WM. MaNeT /—*rader* /—*om*

. . . . . .

(Sign Here) Trader Tom

When he looked up from the card, Manet saw the box. Trader Tom was pushing it across the floor towards him.

The box had the general dimensions of a coffin, but it wasn't wood — only brightly illustrated cardboard. There was a large four-color picture on the lid showing men, women and children moving through a busy city street. The red and blue letters said:

LIFO

The Socialization Kit

"It is commercialized," Trader Tom admitted with no little chagrin. "It is presented to appeal to a twelve-year-old child, an erotic, aggressive twelve-year-old, the typical sensie goer — but that is reality. It offends men of good taste like ourselves, yet sometimes it approaches being art. We must accept it."

"What's the cost?" Manet asked. "Before I accept it, I have to know the charges."

"You never know the cost. Only your executor knows that. It's the Trader Tom plan."

"Well, is it guaranteed?"

"There are no guarantees," Trader Tom admitted. "But I've never had any complaints yet."

"Suppose I'm the first?" Manet suggested reasonably.

"You won't be," Trader Tom said. "I won't pass this way again."

MANET didn't open the box. He let it fade quietly in the filtered but still brilliant sunlight near a transparent wall.

Manet puttered around the spawning monster, trying to brush the copper taste of the station out of his mouth in the

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mornings, talking to himself, winking at Annie Oakley, and waiting to go mad.

Finally, Manet woke up one morning. He lay in the sheets of his bunk, suppressing the urge to go wash his hands, and came at last to the conclusion that, after all the delay, he was mad.

So he went to open the box.

The cardboard lid seemed to have become both brittle and rotten. It crumbled as easily as ideals. But Manet was old enough to remember the boxes Japanese toys came in when he was a boy, and was not alarmed.

The contents were such a glorious pile of junk, of bottles from old chemistry sets, of pieces from old Erector sets, of nameless things and unremembered antiques from neglected places, that it seemed too good to have been assembled commercially. It was the collection of lifetime.

On top of everything was a paperbound book, the size of the *Reader's Digest*, covered in rippled gray flexiboard. The title was stamped in black on the spine and cover: *The Making of Friends.*

Manet opened the book and, turning one blank page, found the title in larger print and slightly amplied: *The Making of Friends and Others.* There was no author listed. A further line of information stated: "A Manual for Lifo, The Socialization Kit." At the bottom of the title page, the publisher was identified as: LIFO KIT CO., LTD., SYRACUSE.

The unnumbered first chapter was headed *Your First Friend.*

Before you go further, first find the *Modifier* in your kit. This is *vital.*

He quickly riffled through the pages. *Other Friends, Authority, A Companion* . . . Then *The Final Model.* Manet tried to flip past this section, but the pages after the sheet labeled *The Final Model* were stuck together. More than stuck. There was a thick slab of plastic in the back of the book. The edges were ridged as if there were pages to this section, but they could only be the tracks of lame ants.

Manet flipped back to page one.

First find the *Modifier* in your kit. This is *vital* to your entire experiment in socialization. The *Modifier is Part #A-1 on the* Master Chart.

He prowled through the box looking for some kind of a chart. There was nothing that looked like a chart inside. He retrieved the lid and looked at its inside.

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Nothing. He tipped the box and looked at its outside. Not a thing. There was always something missing from kits. Maybe even the *Modifier* itself.

He read on, and probed and scattered the parts in the long box. He studied the manual intently and groped out with his free hand.

The toe bone was connected to the foot bone. . .

THE Red King sat smugly in his diagonal corner.

The Black King stood two places away, his top half tipsy in frustration.

The Red King crabbed sideways one square.

The Black King pounced forward one space.

The Red King advanced backwards to face the enemy.

The Black King shuffled sideways.

The Red King followed. . .

Uselessly.

"Tie game," Ronald said.

"Tie game," Manet said.

"Let's talk," Ronald said cheerfully. He was always cheerful.

Cheerfulness was a personality trait Manet had thumbed out for him. Cheerful. Submissive. Cooperative. Manet had selected these factors in order to make Ronald as different a person from himself as possible.

"The Korean-American War was the greatest of all wars," Ronald said pontifically.

"Only in the air," Manet corrected him.

Intelligence was one of the factors Manet had punched to suppress. Intelligence. Aggressiveness. Sense of perfection. Ronald couldn't know any more than Manet, but he could (and did) know less. He had seen to that when his own encephalograph matrix had programmed Ronald's feeder.

"There were no dogfights in Korea," Ronald said.

"I know."

"The dogfight was a combat of hundreds of planes in a tight area, the last of which took place near the end of the First World War. The aerial duel, sometimes inaccurately referred to as a 'dogfight' was not seen in Korea either. The pilots at supersonic speeds only had time for single passes at the enemy. Still, I believe, contrary to all experts, that this took greater skill, man more wedded to machine, than the leisurely combats of World War One."

"I know."

"Daniel Boone was still a crack shot at eight-five. He was said to be warm, sincere, modest, truthful, respected and rheumatic."

"I know."

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MANET knew it all. He had heard it all before.

He was so damned sick of hearing about Korean air battles, Daniel Boone, the literary qualities of ancient sports fiction magazines, the painting of Norman Rockwell, New York swing, *ad nauseum*. What a narrow band of interests! With the whole universe to explore in thought and concept, why did he have to be trapped with such an unoriginal human being?

Of course, Ronald wasn't an original human being. He was a copy.

Manet had been interested in the Fabulous Forties — Lt. "Hoot" Gibson, Sam Merwin tennis stories, *Saturday Evening Post* covers — when he had first learned of them, and he had learned all about them. He had firm opinions on all these.

He yearned for someone to challenge him — to say that *Dime Sports* had been nothing but a cheap yellow rag and, why, *Sewanee Review*, there had been a magazine for you.

Manet's only consolidation was that Ronald's tastes were lower than his own. He patriotically insisted that the American Sabre Jet was superior to the Mig. He maintained with a straight face that Tommy Dorsey was a better band man than Benny Goodman. Ronald was a terrific jerk.

"Ronald," Manet said "you are a terrific jerk."

Ronald leaped up immediately and led with his right.

Manet blocked it deftly and threw a right cross.

Ronald blocked it deftly, and drove in a right to the navel.

The two men separated and, puffing like steam locomotives passing the diesel works, closed again.

Ronald leaped forward and lead with his right.

Manet stepped inside the swing and lifted an uppercut to the ledge of Ronald's jaw.

Ronald pinwheeled to the floor.

He lifted his bruised head from the deck and worked his reddened mouth. "Had enough?" he asked Manet.

Manet dropped his fists to his sides and turned away. "Yes."

Ronald hopped up lightly. "Another checkers, Billy Boy?"

"No."

"Okay. Anything you want, William, old conquerer."

Manet scrunched up inside himself in impotent fury.

Ronald was maddeningly cooperative and peaceful. He would even get in a fist fight to avoid trouble between them. He would do anything Manet wanted him to do. He was so utterly damned stupid.

Manet's eyes orbitted towards the checkerboard.

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But if he were so much more stupid than he, Manet, why was it that their checker games always ended in a tie?

THE calendar said it was Spring on Earth when the radio was activated for a high-speed information and entertainment transmission.

The buzzer-flasher activated in the solarium at the same time.

Manet lay stretched out on his back, naked, in front of the transparent wall.

By rolling his eyes back in his head, Manet could see over a hedge of eyebrows for several hundred flat miles of white sand.

And several hundred miles of desert could see him.

For a moment he gloried in the blatant display of his flabby muscles and patchy sunburn.

Then he sighed, rolled over to his feet and started trudging toward Communication.

He padded down the rib-ridged matted corridor, taking his usual small pleasure in the kaleidoscopic effect of the spiraling reflections on the walls of the tubeway.

As he passed the File Room, he caught the sound of the pounding vibrations against the stoppered plug of the hatch.

"Come on, Billy Buddy, let me out of this place!"

Manet padded on down the hall. He had, he recalled, shoved Ronald in there on Lincoln's Birthday, a minor ironic twist he appreciated quietly. He had been waiting in vain for Ronald to run down ever since.

In Communication, he took a seat and punched the slowed down playback of the transmission.

"Hello, Overseers," the Voice said. It was the Voice of the B.B.C. It irritated Manet. He never understood how the British had got the space transmissions assignment for the English language. He would have preferred an American disk-jockey himself, one who appreciated New York swing.

"We imagine that you are most interested in how long you shall be required to stay at your present stations," said the Voice of God's paternal uncle. "As you on Mars may know, there has been much discussion as to how long it will require to complete the present schedule —" there was of course no "K" sound in the word — "for atmosphere seeding.

"The original, non-binding estimate at the time of your departure was 18.2 years. However, determining how long it will take our stations properly to remake the air of Mars is a problem comparable to finding the age of the Earth. Estimates change as new factors are learned. You may re-

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call that three years ago the official estimate was changed to thirty-one years. The recent estimate by certain reactionary sources of two hundred and seventy-four years is *not* an official government estimate. The news for you is good, if you are becoming nostalgic for home, or not particularly bad if you are counting on drawing your handsome salary for the time spent on Mars. We have every reason to believe our *original* estimate was substantially correct. The total time is, within limits of error, a flat 18 years."

A very flat 18 years, Manet thought as he palmed off the recorder.

He sat there thinking about eighteen years.

He did not switch to video for some freshly taped westerns.

Finally, Manet went back to the solarium and dragged the big box out. There was a lot left inside.

One of those parts, one of those bones or struts of flesh sprayers, one of them, he now knew, was the Modifier.

The Modifier was what he needed to change Ronald. Or to shut him off.

If only the Master Chart hadn't been lost, so he would know what the Modifier looked like! He hoped the Modifier itself wasn't lost. He hated to think of Ronald locked in the Usher tomb of the File Room for 18 flat years. Long before that, he would have worn his fists away hammering at the hatch. Then he might start pounding with his head. Perhaps before the time was up he would have worn himself down to nothing whatsoever.

Manet selected the ripple-finished gray-covered manual from the hodgepodge, and thought: eighteen years.

Perhaps I should have begun here, he told himself. But I really don't have as much interest in that sort of thing as the earthier types. Simple companionship was all I wanted. And, he thought on, even an insipid personality like Ronald's would be bearable with certain compensations.

Manet opened the book to the chapter headed: *The Making of a Girl.*

VERONICA crept up behind Manet and slithered her hands up his back and over his shoulders. She leaned forward and breathed a moist warmth into his ear, and worried the lobe with her even white teeth.

"Daniel Boone," she sighed huskily, "only killed three Indians in his life."

"I know."

Manet folded his arms stoically and added: "Please don't talk."

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She sighed her instant agreement and moved her expressive hands over his chest and up to the hollows of his throat.

"I need a shave," he observed.

Her hands instantly caressed his face to prove that she liked a rather bristly, masculine countenance.

Manet elbowed Veronica away in a gentlemanly fashion.

She made her return.

"Not now," he instructed her.

"Whenever you say."

He stood up and began pacing off the dimensions of the compartment. There was no doubt about it: he had been missing his regular exercise.

"Now?" she asked.

"I'll tell you."

"If you were a jet pilot," Veronica said wistfully, "you would be romantic. You would grab love when you could. You would never know which moment would be last. You would make the most of each one."

"I'm not a jet pilot," Manet said. "There are no jet pilots. There haven't been any for generations."

"Don't be silly," Veronica said. "Who else would stop those vile North Koreans and Red China 'volunteers'?"

"Veronica," he said carefully, "the Korean War is over. It was finished even before the last of the jet pilots."

"Don't be silly," she snapped. "If it were over, I'd know about it, wouldn't I?"

She would, except that somehow she had turned out even less bright, less equipped with Manet's own store of information, than Ronald. Whoever had built the Lifo kit must have had ancient ideas about what constituted appropriate "feminine" characteristics.

"I suppose," he said heavily, "that you would like me to take you back to Earth and introduce you to Daniel Boone?"

"Oh, yes."

"Veronica, your stupidity is hideous."

She lowered her long blonde lashes on her pink cheeks. "That is a mean thing to say to me. But I forgive you."

An invisible hand began pressing down steadily on the top of his head until it forced a sound out of him. "Aaaawrraagggh! Must you be so cloyingly sweet? Do you have to keep taking that? Isn't there any fight in you at all?"

He stepped forward and backhanded her across the jaw.

It was the first time he had ever struck a woman, he realized regretfully. He now knew he should have been doing it long ago.

Veronica sprang forward and led with a right.

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RONALD'S cries grew louder as Manet marched Veronica through the corridor.

"Hear that?" he inquired, smiling with clenched teeth.

"No, darling."

Well, that was all right. He remembered he had once told her to ignore the noise. She was still following orders.

"Come on, Bill, open up the hatch for old Ronald," the voice carried through sepulchrally.

"Shut up!" Manet yelled.

The voice dwindled stubbornly, then cut off.

A silence with a whisper of metallic ring to it.

Why hadn't he thought of that before? Maybe because he secretly took comfort in the sound of an almost human voice echoing through the station.

Manet threw back the bolt and wheeled back the hatch.

Ronald looked just the same as had when Manet had seen him last. His hands didn't seem to have been worn away in the least. Ronald's lips seemed a trifle chapped. But that probably came not from all the shouting but from having nothing to drink for some months.

Ronald didn't say anything to Manet.

But he looked offended.

"You," Manet said to Veronica with a shove in the small of the back, "inside, inside."

Ronald sidestepped the lurching girl.

"Do you know what I'm going to do with you? Manet demanded. "I'm going to lock you up in here, and leave you for a day, a month, a year, forever! Now what do you think about that?"

"If you think it's the *right* thing, dear," Veronica said hesitantly.

"You know best, Willy," Ronald said uncertainly.

Manet slammed the hatch in disgust.

Manet walked carefully down the corridor, watching streamers of his reflection corkscrewing into the curved walls. He had to walk carefully, else the artery would roll up tight and squash him. But he walked too carefully for this to happen.

As he passed the File Room, Ronald's voice said: "In my opinion, William, you should let us out."

"I," Veronica said, "honestly feel that you should let me out, Bill, dearest."

Manet giggled. "What? What was that? Do you suggest that I take you back after you've been behind a locked door with my best friend?"

He went down the corridor, giggling.

He giggled and thought: This will never do.

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POURING and tumbling through the Lifo kit, consulting the manual diligently, Manet concluded that there weren't enough parts left in the box to go around.

The book gave instructions for The Model Mother, The Model Father, The Model Sibling and others. Yet there weren't parts enough in the kit.

He would have to take parts from Ronald or Veronica in order to make any one of the others. And he could not do that without the Modifier.

He wished Trader Tom would return and extract some higher price from him for the Modifier, which was clearly missing from the kit.

Or to get even more for simply repossessing the kit.

But Trader Tom would not be back. He came this way only once.

Manet thumbed through the manual in mechanical frustration. As he did so, the solid piece of the last section parted sheet by sheet.

He glanced forward and found the headings: *The Final Model.*

There seemed something ominous about that finality. But he had paid a price for the kit, hadn't he? Who knew what price, when it came to that? He had every right to get everything out of the kit that he could.

He read the unfolding pages critically. The odd assortment of ill-matched parts left in the box took a new shape in his mind and under his fingers. . .

Manet gave one final spurt from the flesh-sprayer and stood back.

Victor was finished. Perfect.

Manet stepped forward, lifted the model's left eyelid, tweaked his nose.

"Move!"

Victor leaped back into the Lifo kit and did a jig on one of the flesh-sprayers.

As the device twisted as handily as good intentions, Manet realized that it was not a flesh-sprayer but the Modifier.

"It's finished!" were Victor's first words. "It's done!"

Manet stared at the tiny wreck. "To say the least."

Victor stepped out of the oblong box. "There is something you should understand. I am different from the others."

"They all say that."

"I am not your friend."

"No?"

"No. You have made yourself an enemy."

Manet felt nothing more at this information than an esthetic pleasure at the symmetry of the situation.

"It completes the final course in socialization," Victor continued. "I am your adversary. I will

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do everything I can to defeat you. I have *all* your knowledge. *You* do not have all your knowledge. If you let yourself know some of the things, it could be used against you. It is my function to use everything I possibly can against you."

"When do you start?"

"I've finished. I've done my worst. I have destroyed the Modifier."

"What's so bad about that?" Manet asked with some interest.

"You'll have Veronica and Ronald and me forever now. We'll never change. You'll get older, and we'll never change. You'll lose your interest in New York swing and jet combat and Daniel Boone, and we'll never change. We don't change and you can't change us for others. I've made the worst thing happen to you that can happen to any man. *I've seen that you will always keep your friends.*"

THE prospect was frightful.—Victor smiled. "Aren't you going to denounce me for a fiend?"

"Yes, it is time for the denouncement. Tell me, you feel that now you are through? You have fulfilled your function?"

"Yes. Yes."

"Now you will have but to lean back, as it were, so to speak, and see me suffer?"

"Yes."

"No. Can't do it, old man. Can't. *I* know. You're too human, too like me. The one thing a man can't accept is a passive state, a state of uselessness. Not if he can possibly avoid it. Something has to be happening to him. He has to be happening to something. You didn't kill me because then you would have nothing left to do. You'll never kill me."

"Of course not!" Victor stormed. "Fundamental safety cut-off!"

"Rationalization. You don't *want* to kill me. And you can't stop challenging me at every turn. That's your function."

"Stop talking and just think about your miserable life," Victor said meanly. "Your friends won't grow and mature with you. You won't make any new friends. You'll have me to constantly remind you of your uselessness, your constant unrelenting sterility of purpose. How's that for boredom, for passiveness?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you," Manet said irritably, his social manners rusty. "I won't be bored. You will see to that. It's your purpose. You'll be a challenge, an obstacle, a source of triumph every foot of the way. Don't you see? With you for an enemy, I don't need a friend!"

— JIM HARMON

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he remembered the kick in the gut that still made walking painful. He even remembered the series of blows about the skull that had knocked him out.

The bruises along his rib cage and left arm, though, he did not remember getting. Obviously the police had been mad enough to keep right on subduing him after he was already unconscious.

Chandler did not blame them — exactly. He supposed he would have done the same thing.

The judge was having a long mumble with the court stenographer apparently about something which had happened in the Union House the night before. Chandler knew Judge Ellithorp slightly. He did not expect to get a fair trial. The previous December the judge himself, while possessed, had smashed the transmitter of the town's radio station, which he owned, and set fire to the building it occupied. His son-in-law had been killed in the fire.

Laughing, the judge waved the reporter back to his seat and glanced around the courtroom. His gaze touched Chandler lightly, like the flick of the hanging strands of cord that precede a railroad tunnel. The touch carried the same warning. What lay ahead for Chandler was destruction.

"Read the charge," ordered Judge Ellithorp. He spoke very loudly. There were more than six hundred persons in the auditorium; the judge didn't want any of them to miss a word.

The bailiff ordered Chandler to stand and informed him that he was accused of having, on the seventeenth day of June last, committed on the person of Margaret Flershem, a minor, an act of rape — "Louder!" ordered the judge testily.

"Yes, Your Honor," said the bailiff, and inflated his chest. "An Act of Rape under Threat of Bodily Violence;" he cried; "and Did Further Commit on the Person of Said Margaret Flershem an Act of Aggravated Assault—"

Chandler rubbed his aching side, looking at the ceiling. He remembered the look in Peggy Flershem's eyes as he forced himself on her. She was only sixteen years old, and at that time he hadn't even known her name.

The bailiff boomed on: "—and Did Further Commit on that Same Seventeenth Day of June Last on the Person of Ingovar Porter an Act of Assault with Intent to Rape, the Foregoing Being a True Bill Handed Down by the Grand Jury of Sepulpas County in Extraordinary Session Assembled, the Eighteenth Day of June Last."

Judge Ellithorp looked satisfied as the bailiff sat down, quite winded. While the judge hunted

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through the papers on his desk the crowd in the auditorium stirred and murmured.

A child began to cry.

THE JUDGE stood up and pounded his gavel. "What is it? What's the matter with him? You, Dundon!" The court attendant the judge was looking at hurried over and spoke to the child's mother, then reported to the judge.

"I dunno, Your Honor. All he says is something scared him."

The judge was enraged. "Well, that's just fine! Now we have to take up the time of all these good people, probably for no reason, and hold up the business of this court, just because of a child. Bailiff! I want you to clear this courtroom of all children under — " he hesitated, calculating voting blocks in his head — "all children under the age of six. Dr. Palmer, are you there? Well, you better go ahead with the — prayer." The judge could not make himself say "the exorcism."

"I'm sorry, madam," he added to the mother of the crying two-year-old. "If you have someone to leave the child with, I'll instruct the attendants to save your place for you." She was also a voter.

Dr. Palmer rose, very grave, as he was embarrassed. He glared around the all-purpose room, defying anyone to smile, as he chanted: "Domina Pythonis, I command you, leave! Leave, Hel! Leave, Heloym! Leave, Sother and Thetragrammaton, leave, all unclean ones! I command you! In the name of God, in all of His manifestations!" He sat down again, still very grave. He knew that he did not make nearly as fine a showing as Father Lon, with his resonant *in nomina Jesu Christi et Sancti Ubaldi* and his censer, but the post of exorcist was filled in strict rotation, one month to a denomination, ever since the troubles started. Dr. Palmer was a Unitarian. Exorcisms had not been in the curriculum at the seminary and he had been forced to invent his own.

Chandler's lawyer tapped him on the shoulder. "Last chance to change your mind," he said.

"No. I'm not guilty, and that's the way I want to plead."

The lawyer shrugged and stood up, waiting for the judge to notice him.

Chandler, for the first time, allowed himself to meet the eyes of the crowd.

He studied the jury first. He knew some of them casually — it was not a big enough town to command a jury of total strangers for any defendant, and Chandler had lived there most of his life. He recognized Pop

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Matheson, old and very stiff, who ran the railroad station cigar stand. Two of the other men were familiar as faces passed in the street. The forewoman, though, was a stranger. She sat there very composed and frowning, and all he knew about her was that she wore funny hats. Yesterday's had been red roses when she was selected from the panel; today's was, of all things, a stuffed bird.

He did not think that any of them were possessed. He was not so sure of the audience.

He saw girls he had dated in high school, long before he met Margot; men he worked with at the plant. They all glanced at him, but he was not sure who was looking out through some of those familiar eyes. The visitors reliably watched all large gatherings, at least momentarily; it would be surprising if none of them were here.

"All right, how do you plead," said Judge Ellithorp at last.

Chandler's lawyer straightened up. "Not guilty, Your Honor, by reason of temporary pandemic insanity."

The judge looked pleased. The crowd murmured, but they were pleased too. They had him dead to rights and it would have been a disappointment if Chandler had pleaded guilty. They wanted to see one of the vilest criminals in contemporary human society caught, exposed, convicted and punished; they did not want to miss a step of the process. Already in the playground behind the school three deputies from the sheriff's office were loading their rifles, while the school janitor chalked lines around the handball court to mark where the crowd witnessing the execution would be permitted to stand.

THE PROSECUTION made its case very quickly. Mrs. Porter testified that she worked at McKelvey Bros., the antibiotics plant, where the defendant also worked. Yes, that was him. She had been attracted by the noise from the culture room last — let's see — "Was it the seventeenth day of June last?" prompted the prosecutor, and Chandler's attorney instinctively gathered his muscles to rise, hesitated, glanced at his client and shrugged. That was right, it was the seventeenth. Incautiously she went right into the room. She should have known better, she admitted. She should have called the plant police right away, but, well, they hadn't had any trouble at the plant, you know, and — well, she didn't. She was a stupid woman, for all that she was rather good-looking, and insatiably curious. She had seen Peggy Flershem on the floor.

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"She was all *blood.* And her clothes were — And she was, I mean her — her body was —" With relentless tact the prosecutor allowed her to stammer out her observation that the girl had clearly been raped. And she had seen Chandler laughing and breaking up the place, throwing racks of cultures through the windows, upsetting trays. Of course she had crossed herself and tried a quick exorcism but there was no visible effect; then Chandler had leaped at her. "He was *hateful!* He was just *foul!*" But as he began to attack her the plant police came, drawn by her screams.

Chandler's attorney did not question.

Peggy Flershem's deposition was introduced without objection from the defense. But she had little to say anyway, having been dazed at first and unconscious later. The plant police testified to having arrested Chandler; a doctor described in chaste medical words the derangements Chandler had worked on Peggy Flershem's virgin anatomy. There was no question from Chandler's lawyer — and, for that matter, nothing to question. Chandler did not hope to pretend that he had not ravished and nearly killed one girl, then done his best to repeat the process on another. Sitting there as the doctor testified, Chandler was able to tally every break and bruise against the memory of what his own body had done. He had been a spectator then, too, as remote from the event as he was now; but that was why they had him on trial. That was what they did not believe.

At twelve-thirty the prosecution rested its case, Judge Ellithorp looking very pleased. He recessed the court for one hour for lunch, and the guards took Chandler back to the detention cell in the basement of the school.

Two Swiss cheese sandwiches and a wax-paper carton of chocolate milk were on the desk. They were Chandler's lunch. As they had been standing, the sandwiches were crusty and the milk lukewarm. He ate them anyway. He knew what the judge looked pleased about. At one-thirty Chandler's lawyer would put him on the stand, and no one would pay very much attention to what he had to say, and the jury would be out at most twenty minutes, and the verdict would be guilty. The judge was pleased because he would be able to pronounce sentence no later than four o'clock, no matter what. They had formed the habit of holding the executions at sundown. As, at that time of year, sundown was after seven, it would all go very well — for everyone but

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Chandler. For Chandler it would be the end.

II

THE ODD thing about Chandler's dilemma was not merely that he was innocent — in a way, that is — but that many who were guilty (in a way; as guilty as he himself, at any rate) were free and honored citizens. Chandler himself was a widower because his own wife had been murdered. He had seen the murderer leaving the scene of the crime, and the man he had seen was in the courtroom today, watching Chandler's own trial. Of the six hundred or so in the court, at least fifty were known to have taken part in one or more provable acts of murder, rape, arson, theft, sodomy, vandalism, assault and battery or a dozen other offenses indictable under the laws of the state. Of course, that could be said of almost any community in the world in those years; Chandler's was not unique. What had put Chandler in the dock was not what his body had been seen to do, but the place in which it had been seen to do it. For everybody knew that medicine and agriculture were never molested by the demons.

Chandler's own lawyer had pointed that out to him the day before the trial. "If it was anywhere but at the McKelvey plant, all right, but there's never been any trouble there. You know that. The trouble with you laymen is you think of lawyers in terms of Perry Mason, right? Rabbit out of the hat stuff. Well, I can't do that. I can only present your case, whatever it is, the best way possible. And the best thing I can do for your case right now is tell you you haven't got one." At that time the lawyer was still trying to be fair. He was even casting around for some thought he could use to convince himself that his client was innocent, though he had frankly admitted as soon as he introduced himself that he didn't have much hope there.

Chandler protested that he didn't have to commit rape. He'd been a widower for a year, but —

"Wait a minute," said the lawyer. "Listen. You can't make an ordinary claim of possession stick, but what about good old-fashioned insanity?" Chandler looked puzzled, so the lawyer explained. Wasn't it possible that Chandler was — consciously, subconsciously, unconsciously, call it what you will — trying to get revenge for what had happened to his own wife?

No, said Chandler, certainly not! But then he had to stop and think. After all, he had never been possessed before; in fact, he

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had always retained a certain skepticism about "possession" — it seemed like such a convenient way for anyone to do any illicit thing he chose — until the moment when he looked up to see Peggy Flershem walking into the culture room with a tray of agar disks, and was astonished to find himself striking her with the wrench in his hand and ripping at her absurdly floral-printed slacks. Maybe his case was different. Maybe it wasn't the sort of possession that struck at random; maybe he was just off his rocker.

Margot, his wife, had been cut up cruelly. He had seen his friend, Jack Souther, leaving his home hurriedly as he approached; and although he had thought that the stains on his clothes looked queerly like blood, nothing in that prepared him for what he found in the rumpus room. It had taken him some time to identify the spread-out dissection on the floor with his wife Margot . . . "No," he told his lawyer, "I was shaken up, of course. The worst time was the next night, when there was a knock on the door and I opened it and it was Jack. He'd come to apologize. I — fell apart; but I got over it. I tell you I was possessed, that's all."

"And I tell you that defense will put you right in front of a firing squad," said his lawyer. "And *that's* all."

FIVE OR SIX others had been executed for hoaxing; Chandler was familiar with the ritual. He even understood it, in a way. The world had gone to pot in the previous two years. The real enemy was out of reach; when any citizen might run wild and, when caught, relapse into his own self, terrified and sick, there was a need to strike back. But the enemy was invisible. The hoaxers were only whipping boys — but they were the only targets vengeance had.

The real enemy had struck the entire world in a single night. One day the people of the world went about their business in the gloomy knowledge that they were likely to make mistakes but with, at least, the comfort that the mistakes would be their own. The next day had no such comfort. The next day anyone, anywhere, was likely to find himself seized, possessed, working evil or whimsy without intention and helplessly.

Chandler stood up, kicked the balled-up wax paper from his sandwiches across the floor and swore violently.

He was beginning to wake from the shock that had gripped him. "Damn fool," he said to himself. He had no particular reason.

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Like the world, he needed a whipping boy too, if only himself. "Damn fool, you know they're going to shoot you!"

He stretched and twisted his body violently, alone in the middle of the room, in silence. He *had* to wake up. He *had* to start thinking. In a quarter of an hour or less the court would reconvene, and from then it was only a steady, quick slide to the grave.

It was better to do anything than to do nothing. He examined the windows of his improvised cell. They were above his head and barred; standing on the table, he could see feet walking outside, in the paved play-yard of the school. He discarded the thought of escaping that way; there was no one to smuggle him a file, and there was no time. He studied the door to the hall. It was not impossible that when the guard opened it he could jump him, knock him out, run . . . run where? The room had been a storage place for athletic equipment at the end of a hall; the hall led only to the stairs and the stairs emerged into the courtroom. It was quite likely, he thought, that the hall had another flight of stairs somewhere farther along, or through another room. What had he spent his taxes on these years, if not for schools designed with more than one exit in case of fire? But as he had not thought to mark an escape route when he was brought in, it did him no good.

The guard, however, had a gun. Chandler lifted up an edge of the table and tried to shake one of the legs. They did not shake; that part of his taxes had been well enough spent, he thought wryly. The chair? Could he smash the chair to get a club, which would give him a weapon to get the guard's gun? . . .

Before he reached the chair the door opened and his lawyer came in.

"Sorry I'm late," he said briskly. "Well. As your attorney I have to tell you they've presented a damaging case. As I see it —"

"What case?" Chandler demanded. "I never denied the acts. What else did they prove?"

"Oh, God!" said his lawyer, not quite loudly enough to be insulting. "Do we have to go over that again? Your claim of possession would make a defense if it had happened anywhere else. We know that these cases exist, but we also know that they follow a pattern. Some areas seem to be immune — medical establishments, pharmaceutical plants among them. So they proved that all this happened in a pharmaceutical plant. I advise you to plead guilty."

Chandler sat down on the edge of the table, controlling

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himself very well, he thought. He only asked: "Would that do me any good at all?"

The lawyer reflected, gazing at the ceiling. ". . . No. I guess it wouldn't."

Chandler nodded. "So what else shall we talk about? Want to compare notes about where you were and I was the night the President went possessed?"

The lawyer was irritated. He kept his mouth shut for a moment until he thought he could keep from showing it. Outside a vendor was hawking amulets: "St. Ann beads! Witch knots! Fresh garlic, local grown, best in town!" The lawyer shook his head.

"All right," he said, "it's your life. We'll do it your way. Anyway, time's up; Sergeant Grantz will be banging on the door any minute."

He zipped up his briefcase. Chandler did not move. "They don't give us much time anyway," the lawyer added, angry at Chandler and at hoaxers in general but not willing to say so. "Grantz is a stickler for promptness."

Chandler found a crumb of cheese by his hand and absently ate it. The lawyer watched him and glanced at his watch. "Oh, hell," he said, picked up his briefcase and kicked the base of the door. "Grantz! What's the matter with you? You asleep out there?"

CHANDLER was sworn, gave his name, admitted the truth of everything the previous witnesses had said. The faces were still aimed at him, every one. He could not read them at all any more, could not tell if they were friendly or hating, there were too many and they all had eyes. The jurors sat on their funeral-parlor chairs like cadavers, embalmed and propped, the dead witnessing a wake for the living. Only the forewoman in the funny hat showed signs of life, looking alertly at Chandler, at the judge, at the man next to her, around the auditorium. Maybe it was a good sign. At least she did not have the frozen in concrete, guilty-as-hell look of the others.

His attorney asked him the question he had been waiting for: "Tell us, in your own words, what happened." Chandler opened his mouth, and paused. Curiously, he had forgotten what he wanted to say. He had rehearsed this moment again and again; but all that came out was:

"I didn't do it. I mean, I did the acts, but I was possessed. That's all. Others have done worse, under the same circumstances, and been let off. Just as Fisher was acquitted for murdering the Learnards, as Draper got

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off after what he did to the Cline boy. As Jack Souther over there was let off after he murdered my own wife. They should be. They couldn't help themselves. Whatever this thing is that takes control, I know it can't be fought. My God, you can't even *try* to fight it!"

He was not getting through. The faces had not changed. The forewoman of the jury was now searching systematically through her pocketbook, taking each item out and examining it, putting it back and taking out another. But between times she looked at him and at least her expression wasn't hostile. He said, addressing her:

"That's all there is to it. It wasn't me running my body. It was someone else. I swear it before all of you, and before God."

The prosecutor did not bother to question him.

Chandler went back to his seat and sat down and watched the next twenty minutes go by in the wink of an eye, rapid, rapid, they were in a hurry to shoot him. He could hardly believe that Judge Ellithorp could speak so fast, the jurymen rise and file out at a gallop, zip, whisk, and they were back again. Too fast! he cried silently, time had gone into high gear; but he knew that it was only his imagination. The twenty minutes had been a full twelve hundred seconds. And then time, as if to make amends, came to a stop, abrupt, brakes-on. The judge asked the jury for their verdict and it was an eternity before the forewoman arose.

She was beginning to look rather disheveled. Beaming at Chandler — *surely* the woman was rather odd, it couldn't be just his imagination — she fumbled in her pocketbook for the slip of paper with the verdict. But she wore an expression of suppressed laughter.

"I *knew* I had it," she cried triumphantly and waved the slip above her head. "Now, let's see." She held it before her eyes and squinted. "Oh, yes. Judge, we the jury, and so forth and so on —"

She paused to wink at Judge Ellithorp. An uncertain worried murmur welled up in the auditorium. "All that junk, Judge," she explained, "anyway, we unanimously — but *unanimously*, love! — find this son of a bitch innocent. Why," she giggled, "we think he ought to get a medal, you know? I tell you what you do, love, you go right over and give him a big wet kiss and say you're sorry." She kept on talking, but no one heard. The murmur because a mass scream.

"Stop, stop her!" bawled the judge, dropping his glasses. "Bailiff!"

The scream became a word, in many voices chorused: *Pos-*

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sessed! And beyond doubt the woman was. The men around her hurled themselves away, as from leprosy among them, and then washed back like a lynch mob. She was giggling as they fell on her. "Got a cigarette? No cigarettes in this lousy bag — oh." She screamed as they touched her, went limp and screamed again.

It was a different note this time, pure hysteria: "I couldn't *stop.* Oh, *God.*"

CHANDLER caught his lawyer by the arm and jerked him away from staring at the scene. All of a sudden he was alive again. "You, damn it. Listen! The jury acquitted me, right?"

The lawyer was startled. "Don't be ridiculous. It's a clear case of —"

"Be a lawyer, man! You live on technicalities, don't you? Make this one work for me!"

The attorney gave him a queer, thoughtful look, hesitated, shrugged and got to his feet. He had to shout to be heard. "Your honor! I take it my client is free to go."

He made almost as much of a stir as the sobbing woman, but he outshouted the storm. "The jury's verdict is on record. Granted there was an *apparent* case of possession. Nevertheless —"

Judge Ellithorp yelled back: "No nonsense, you! Listen to me, young man —"

The lawyer snapped, "Permission to approach the bench."

"Granted."

Chandler sat unable to move, watching the brief, stormy conference. It was painful to be coming back to life. It was agony to hope. At least, he thought detachedly, his lawyer was fighting for him; the prosecutor's face was a thundercloud.

The lawyer came back, with the expression of a man who has won a victory he did not expect, and did not want. "Your last chance, Chandler. Change your plea to guilty."

"But —"

"Don't push your luck, boy! The judge has agreed to accept a plea. They'll throw you out of town, of course. But you'll be alive." Chandler hesitated. "Make up your mind! The best I can do otherwise is a mistrial, and that means you'll get convicted by another jury next week."

Chandler said, testing his luck: "You're sure they'll keep their end of the bargain?"

The lawyer shook his head, his expression that of a man who smells something unpleasant. "Your honor! I ask you to discharge the jury. My client wishes to change his plea."

. . . In the school's chemistry lab, an hour later, Chandler dis-

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covered that the lawyer had left out one little detail. Outside there was a sound of motors idling, the police car that would dump him at the town's limits; inside was a thin, hollow hiss. It was the sound of a Bunsen burner, and in its blue flame a crudely shaped iron changed slowly from cherry to orange to glowing straw. It had the shape of a letter "H".

"H" for "hoaxer." The mark they were about to put on his forehead would be with him wherever he went and as long as he lived, which would probably not be long. "H" for "hoaxer," so that a glance would show that he had been convicted of the worst offense of all.

No one spoke to him as the sheriff's man took the iron out of the fire, but three husky policemen held his arms while he screamed.

III

THE pain was still burning when Chandler awoke the next day. He wished he had a bandage, but he didn't, and that was that.

He was in a freight car — had hopped it on the run at the yards, daring to sneak back into town long enough for that. He could not hope to hitchhike, with that mark on him. Anyway, hitchhiking was an invitation to trouble.

The railroads were safer — far safer than either cars or air transport, notoriously a lightning-rod attracting possession. Chandler was surprised when the train came crashing to a stop, each freight car smashing against the couplings of the one ahead, the engine jolting forward and stopping again.

Then there was silence. It endured.

Chandler, who had been slowly waking after a night of very little sleep, sat up against the wall of the boxcar and wondered what was wrong.

It seemed remiss to start a day without signing the Cross or hearing a few exorcismal verses. It seemed to be mid-morning, time for work to be beginning at the plant. The lab men would be streaming in, their amulets examined at the door. The chaplains would be wandering about, ready to pray a possessing spirit out. Chandler, who kept an open mind, had considerable doubt of the effectiveness of all the amulets and spells — certainly they had not kept him from a brutal rape — but he felt uneasy without them. . . . The train still was not moving. In the silence he could hear the distant huffing of the engine.

He went to the door, supporting himself with one hand on the wooden wall, and looked out.

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The tracks followed the roll of a river, their bed a few feet higher than an empty three-lane highway, which in turn was a dozen feet about the water. As he looked out the engine brayed twice. The train jolted uncertainly, then stopped again.

Then there was a very long time when nothing happened at all.

From Chandler's car he could not see the engine. He was on the convex of the curve, and the other door of the car was sealed. He did not need to see it to know that something was wrong. There should have been a brakeman running with a flare to ward off other trains; but there was not. There should have been a station, or at least a water tank, to account for the stop in the first place. There was not. Something had gone wrong, and Chandler knew what it was. Not the details, but the central fact that lay behind this and behind almost everything that went wrong these days.

The engineer was possessed. It had to be that.

Yet it was odd, he thought, as odd as his own trouble. He had chosen this car with care. It contained eight refrigerator cars full of pharmaceuticals, and if anything was known about the laws governing possession, as his lawyer had told him, it was that such things were almost never interfered with.

Chandler jumped down to the roadbed, slipped on the crushed rock and almost fell. He had forgotten the wound on his forehead. He clutched the sill of the car door, where an ankh and fleur-de-lis had been chalked to ward off demons, until the sudden rush of blood subsided and the pain began to relent. After a moment he walked gingerly to the end of the car, slipped between the cars, dodged the couplers and climbed the ladder to its roof.

It was a warm, bright, silent day. Nothing moved. From his height he could see the Diesel at the front of the train and the caboose at its rear. No people. The train was halted a quarter-mile from where the tracks swooped across the river on a suspension bridge. Away from the river, the side of the tracks that had been hidden from him before, was an uneven rock cut and, above it, the slope of a mountain.

By looking carefully he could spot the signs of a number of homes within half a mile or so — the corner of a roof, a glassed-in porch built to command a river view, a twenty-foot television antenna poking through the trees. There was also the curve of a higher road along which the homes were strung.

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Chandler took thought. He was alive and free, two gifts more gracious than he had had any right to expect. However, he would need food and he would need at least some sort of bandage for his forehead. He had a wool cap, stolen from the high school, which would hide the mark, though what it would do to the burn on his skin was something else again.

Chandler climbed down the ladder. With considerable pain he gentled the cap over the great raw H on his forehead and began to climb the mountain.

HE KNOCKED on the first door he came to, a great old three-story house with well tended gardens.

There was a wait. The air smelled warmly of honeysuckle and mown grass, with wild onions chopped down by the blades of the mower. It was pleasant, or would have been in happier times. He knocked again, peremptorily, and the door was opened at once. Evidently someone had been right inside, listening.

A man stared at him. "Stranger, what do you want?" He was short, plump, with an extremely thick and unkempt beard. It did not appear to have been grown for its own sake, for where the facial hair could not be coaxed to grow his skin had the gross pits of old acne.

Chandler said glibly: "Good morning. I'm working my way east. I need something to eat, and I'm willing to work for it."

The man withdrew, leaving the upper half of the Dutch door open. As it looked in on only a vestibule it did not tell Chandler much. There was one curious thing — a lath and cardboard sign, shaped like an arc of a rainbow, lettered:

WELCOME TO ORPHALESE

He puzzled over it and dismissed it. The entrance room, apart from the sign, had a knickknack shelf of Japanese carved ivory and an old-fashioned umbrella rack, but that added nothing to his knowledge. He had already guessed that the owners of this home were well off. Also it had been recently painted; so they were not demoralized, as so much of the world had been demoralized, by the coming of the possessors. Even the elaborate sculpturing of its hedges had been maintained.

The man came back and with him was a girl of fifteen or so. She was tall, slim and rather homely, with a large jaw and an oval face. "Guy, he's not much to look at," she said to the pock-marked man. "Meggie, shall I let him in?" he asked. "Guy, you

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might as well," she shrugged, staring at Chandler with interest but not sympathy.

"Stranger, come along," said the man named Guy, and led him through a short hall into an enormous living room, a room two stories high with a ten-foot fireplace.

Chandler's first thought was that he had stumbled in upon a wake. The room was neatly laid out in rows of folding chairs, more than half of them occupied. He entered from the side, but all the occupants of the chairs were looking toward him. He returned their stares; he had had a good deal of practice lately in looking back at staring faces, he reflected. "Stranger, go on," said the man who had let him in, nudging him, "and meet the people of Orphalese."

Chandler hardly heard him. He had not expected anything like this. It was a meeting, a Daumier caricature of a Thursday Afternoon Literary Circle, old men with faces like moons, young women with faces like hags. They were strained, haggard and fearful, and a surprising number of them showed some sort of physical defect, a bandaged leg, an arm in a sling or merely the marks of pain on the features. "Stranger, go in," repeated the man, and it was only then that Chandler noticed the man was holding a pistol, pointed at his head.

CHANDLER sat in the rear of the room, watching. There must be thousands of little colonies like this, he reflected; with the breakdown of long-distance communication the world had been atomized. There was a real fear, well justified, of living in large groups, for they too were lightning rods for possession. The world was stumbling along, but it was lame in all its members; a planetary lobotomy had stolen from it its wisdom and plan. If, he reflected dryly, it had ever had any.

But of course things were better in the old days. The world had seemed on the brink of blowing itself up, but at least it was by its own hand. Then came Christmas.

It had happened at Christmas, and the first sign was on nationwide television. The old President, balding, grave and plump, was making a special address to the nation, urging good will to men and, please, artificial trees because of the fire danger in the event of H-bomb raids; in the middle of a sentence twenty million viewers had seen him stop, look dazedly around and say, in a breathless mumble, what sounded like: *"Disht dvornyet ilgt."* He had then picked up the

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Bible on the desk before him and thrown it at the television camera.

The last the televiewers had seen was the fluttering pages of the Book, growing larger as it crashed against the lens, then a flicker and a blinding shot of the studio lights as the cameraman jumped away and the instrument swiveled to stare mindlessly upward. Twenty minutes later the President was dead, as his Secretary of Health and Welfare, hurrying with him back to the White House, calmly took a hand grenade from a Marine guard at the gate and blew the President's party to fragments.

For the President's seizure was only the first and most conspicuous. *"Disht dvornyet ilgt."* C.I.A. specialists were playing the tapes of the broadcast feverishly, electronically cleaning the mumble and stir from the studio away from the words to try to learn, first, the language and second what the devil it meant; but the President who ordered it was dead before the first reel spun, and his successor was not quite sworn in when it became his time to die. The ceremony was interrupted for an emergency call from the War Room, where a very nearly hysterical four-star general was trying to explain why he had ordered the immediate firing of every live missile in his command against Washington, D. C.

Over five hundred missiles were involved. In most of the sites the order was disobeyed, but in six of them, unfortunately, unquestioning discipline won out, thus ending not only the swearing in, the general's weeping explanation, the spinning of tapes, but also some two million lives in the District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia and (through malfunctioning relays on two missiles) Pennsylvania and Vermont. But it was only the beginning.

THESE were the first cases of possession seen by the world in some five hundred years, since the great casting out of devils of the Middle Ages. A thousand more occurred in the next few days, a hundred in the next hours. The timetable was made up out of scattered reports in the wire-service newsrooms, while they still had facilities for spot coverage in any part of the world. (That lasted almost a week.) They identified 237 cases of possession by noon of the next day. Disregarding the dubious items — the Yankee pitcher who leaped from the Manhattan bridge (he had Bright's disease), the warden of San Quentin who seated himself in the gas chamber and, literally, kicked the

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bucket (did he know the Grand Jury was subpoenaing his books?) — disregarding these, the chronology of major cases that evening was:

8:27 PM, E.S.T.: President has attack on television.

8:28 PM, E.S.T.: Prime Minister of England orders bombing raid against Israel, alleging secret plot (order not carried out).

8:28 PM, E.S.T.: Captain of SSN *Ethan Allen*, surfaced near Montauk Point, orders crash dive and course change, proceeding submerged at flank speed to New York Harbor.

9:10 PM, E.S.T.: Eastern Airlines six-engine jet makes wheels-up landing on roof of Pentagon, breaking some 1500 windows but causing no other major damage (except to the people aboard the jet); record of this incident fragmentary because entire site charred black in fusion attack two hours later.

9:23 PM, E.S.T.: Rosalie Pan, musical-comedy star, jumps off stage, runs up center aisle and vanishes in cab, wearing beaded bra, G-string and $2500 headdress. Her movements are traced to Newark airport where she boards TWA jetliner, which is never seen again.

9:50 PM, E.S.T.: Entire S.A.C. fleet of 1200 jet bombers takes off for rendezvous over Newfoundland, where 72% are compelled to ditch as tankers fail to keep refueling rendezvous. (Orders committing the aircraft originate with S.A.C. commander, found to be a suicide.)

10.14 PM, E.S.T.: Submarine fusion explosion destroys 40% of New York City. Analysis of fallout indicates U.S. Navy Polaris missiles were detonated underwater in bay; by elimination it is deduced that the submarine was the *Ethan Allen*.

10:50 PM, E.S.T.: President's party assassinated by Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare; Secretary then dies on bayonet of Marine guard who furnished the grenade.

10:55 PM, E.S.T. Satellite stations observe great nuclear explosions in China and Tibet.

11:03 PM, E.S.T.: Heavily loaded munitions barges exploded near North Sea dikes of Holland; dikes breached, 1800 square miles of reclaimed land flooded out . . .

And so on. The incidents were countless. But before long, before even the C.I.A. had finished the first playthrough of the tapes, before their successors in the task identified *Disht dvornyet ilgt* as a Ukrainian dialect rendering of, My God, it works! — before all this, one fact was already apparent. There were many incidents scattered around the world, but not one of them took place in Russia itself.

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WARSAW was ablaze, China pockmarked with blasts, East Berlin demolished along with its western sector, in eight rounds fired from a U.S. Army nuclear cannon. But the U.S.S.R. had not suffered at all, as far as could be told by the prying eyes in orbit; and that fact was reason enough for it to suffer very greatly very soon.

Within minutes of this discovery what remained of the military strength of the Western world was roaring through airless space toward the most likely targets of the East.

One unscathed missile base in Alaska completed a full shoot, seven missiles with fusion warheads. The three American bases that survived at all in the Mediterranean fired what they had. Even Britain, which had already watched the fire-tails of the American missiles departing on suicide missions, managed to resurrect its own two prototype Blue Streaks from their racks, where they had moldered since the cancellation of the British missile program. One of these museum-pieces destroyed itself in launching, but the other chugged painfully across the sky, the tortoise following the flight of the hares. It arrived a full half-hour after the newer, hotter missiles. It might as well not have bothered. There was not much left to destroy.

It was fortunate for the Communists that most of the Western arsenal had already spent itself in suicide. What was left wiped out Moscow, Leningrad and nine other cities. It was even fortunate for the whole world, for this was the Apocalypse they had dreaded, every possible nuclear weapon committed. But the circumstances were such—hasty orders, often at once recalled; confusion; panic — that most were unfused, many others merely tore great craters in the quickly healing surface of the sea. The fallout was locally murderous but quite spotty.

And the conventional forces invading Russia found nothing to fight. The Russians were as confused as they. There were not many survivors of the very top brass, and no one seemed to know just what had happened.

Was the Secretary of the C.P., U.S.S.R. behind that terrible brief agony? As he was dead before it was over, there was no way to tell. More than a quarter of a billion lives went into mushroom-shaped clouds, and nearly half of them were Russian, Latvian, Tatar and Kalmuck. The Peace Commission squabbled for a month, until the breakdown of communications cut them off from their governments and each other; and in that way, for a time, there was peace.

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THIS was the sort of peace that was left, thought Chandler looking around at the queer faces and queerer surroundings, the peace of medieval baronies, cut off from the world, untouched where the rain of fallout had passed by but hardly civilized any more. Even his own home town, trying to take his life in a form of law, reduced at last to torture and exile to cast him out, was not the civilization he had grown up in but something new and ugly.

There was a great deal of talk he did not understand because he could not quite hear it, though they looked at him. Then Guy, with the gun, led him up to the front of the room. They had constructed an improvised platform out of plywood panels resting on squat, heavy boxes that looked like empty ammunition crates. On the dais was a dentist's chair, bolted to the plywood; and in the chair, strapped in, baby spotlights on steel-tube frames glaring on her, was a girl. She looked at Chandler with regretting eyes but did not speak.

"Stranger, get up there," said Guy, prodding him from behind, and Chandler took a plain wooden chair next to the girl.

"People of Orphalese," cried the teen-age cutie named Meggie, "we have two more brands to save from the imps!"

The men and women in the audience cackled or shrilled, "Save them! Save them!" They all had a look of invisible uniforms, Chandler saw, like baseball players in the lobby of a hotel or soldiers in a diner outside the gate of their post; they were all of a type. Their type was something strange. Some were tall, some short; there were old, fat, lean and young around them; but they all wore about them a look of glowing excitement, muted by an aura of suffering and pain. They wore, in a word, the look of bigots.

The bound girl was not one of them. She might have been twenty years old or as much as thirty. She might have been pretty. It was hard to tell; she wore no makeup, her hair strung raggedly to her neck, and her face was drawn into a tight, lean line. It was her eyes that were alive. She saw Chandler and she was sorry for him. And he saw, as he turned to look at her, that she was manacled to the dentist's chair.

"People of Orphalese," chanted Guy, standing behind Chandler with the muzzle of the gun against his neck, "the *meeting* of the Orphalese Self-Preservation *Society* will now come to *order*." There was an approving, hungry murmur from the audience.

"Well, people of *Orphalese*," Guy went on in his singsong, "the

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agenda for the *day* is first the salvation of we *Orphalese* on McGuire's *Mountain.*"

("All saved, all of us saved," rolled a murmur from the congregation.") A lean, red-headed man bounded to the platform and fussed with the stand of spotlights, turning one of them full on Chandler.

"People of Orphalese, as we are *saved,* do I have your consent to *pass on* and proceed to the next order of *business?*"

("Consent, consent, consent," rolled the echo.)

"And then the *second* item of business is to *welcome* and bring to grace these two newly *found* and adopted *souls.*"

The congregation shouted variously: "Bring them to grace! Save them from the imps! Keep Orphalese from the taint of the beast!"

Evidently Guy was satisfied. He nodded and became more chatty. "Okay, people of Orphalese, let's get down to it. We got two new ones, like I say. Their spirits have gone wandering on the wind, or anyway one of them has, and you all know the et cetera. They have committed a wrong unto others and therefore unto themselves. Herself, I mean. Course, the other one could have a flame spirit in him too." He stared severely at Chandler. "Boys, keep an eye on him, why don't you?" he said to two men in the front row, surrendering his gun. "Meggie, you tell about the female one."

The teen-aged girl stepped forward and said, in a conversational tone but with modest pride, "People of Orph'lese, well, I was walking down the cut and I heard this car coming. Well, I was pretty surprised, you know. I had to figure what to do. You all know what the trouble is with cars."

"The imps!" cried a woman of forty with a face like a catfish.

The girl nodded. "Most prob'ly. Well, I — I mean, people of Orph'lese, well, I was by the switchback where we keep the chevvy-freeze hid, so I just waited till I saw it slowing down for the curve — me out of sight, you know — and I rolled the chevvy-freeze out nice and it caught the wheels. Right over!" she cried gleefully. "Off the shoulder, people of Orph'lese, and into the ditch and over, and I didn't give it a chance to burn. I cut the switch and I had her! I put a knife into her back, just a little, about a quarter of an inch, maybe. Her pain was the breakin' of the shell that enclosed her understanding, like it says. I figured she was all right then because she yelled but I brought her along that way. Then Guy took care of her until we got the synod. Oh," she remembered, "and her tongue

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staggered a little without purpose while he was putting it on, didn't it, Guy?" The bearded man nodded, grinning, and lifted up the girl's foot. Incredulously, Chandler saw that it was bound tight with a three-foot length of barbed wire, wound and twisted like a tourniquet, the blood black and congealed around it. He lifted his shocked eyes to meet the girl's. She only looked at him, with pity and understanding.

Guy patted the foot and let it go. "I didn't have any more C-clamps, people of Orphalese," he apologized, "but it looks all right at that. Well, let's see. We got to make up our minds about these two, I guess — no, wait!" He held up his hand as a murmur began. "First thing is, we ought to read a verse or two."

He opened a purple-bound volume at random, stared at a page for a moment, moving his lips, and then read:

"Some of you say, 'It is the north wind who has woven the clothes we wear.'

"And I say, Ay, it was the north wind, but shame was his loom, and the softening of the sinews was his thread.

"And when his work was done he laughed in the forest."

Gently he closed the book, looking thoughtfully at the wall at the back of the room. He scratched his head. "Well, people of Orphalese," he said slowly, "they're laughing in the forest all right, I guarantee, but we've got one here that may be honest in the flesh, probably is, though she was a thief in the spirit. Right? Well, do we take her in or reject her, O people of Orphalese?"

The audience muttered to itself and then began to call out: "Accept! Oh, bring in the brand! Accept and drive out the imp!"

"Fine," said the teen-ager, rubbing her hands and looking at the bearded man. "Guy, let her go." He began to release her from the chair. "You, girl stranger, what's your name?"

The girl said faintly, "Ellen Braisted."

" '*Meggie*, my name is Ellen Braisted,' " corrected the teen-ager. "Always say the name of the person you're talkin' to in Orph'lese, that way we know it's you talkin', not a flame spirit or wanderer. Okay, go sit down." Ellen limped wordlessly down into the audience. "Oh, and people of Orph'lese," said Meggie, "the car's still there if we need it for anything. It didn't burn. Guy, you go on with this other fellow."

Guy stroked his beard and assessed Chandler, looking him over carefully. "Okay," he said. "People of Orphalese, the *third* order of business is to *welcome* or reject this *other* brand saved from the imps, as may be your *pleas-*

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ure." Chandler sat up straighter now that all of them were looking at him again; but it wasn't quite his turn, at that, because there was an interruption. Guy never finished. From the valley, far below, there was a sudden mighty thunder, rolling among the mountains. The windows blew in with a crystalline crash.

THE room erupted into confusion, the audience leaping from their seats, running to the broad windows, Guy and the teenage girl seizing rifles, everyone in motion at once.

Chandler straightened, then sat down again. The red-headed man guarding him was looking away. It would be quite possible to grab his gun, run, get away from these maniacs. Yet he had nowhere to go. They might be crazy, but they seemed to have organization.

They seemed, in fact, to have worked out, on whatever crazed foundation of philosophy, some practical methods for coping with possession. He decided to stay, wait and see.

And at once he found himself leaping for the gun.

No. Chandler didn't find himself attacking the red-headed man. He found his *body* doing it; Chandler had nothing to do with it. It was the helpless compulsion he had felt before, that had nearly cost him his life; his body active and urgent and his mind completely cut off from it. He felt his own muscles move in ways he had not planned, observed himself leap forward, felt his own fist strike at the back of the red-headed man's ear. The man went spinning, the gun went flying, Chandler's body leaped after it, with Chandler a prisoner in his own brain, watching, horrified and helpless. And he had the gun!

He caught it in the hand that was his own hand, though someone else was moving it; he raised it and half-turned. He was suddenly conscious of a fusillade of gunfire from the roof, and a scattered echo of guns all round the outside of the house. Part of him was surprised, another alien part was not. He started to shoot the teen-aged girl in the back of the head, silently shouting *No!*

His fingers never pulled the trigger.

He caught a second's glimpse of someone just beside him, whirled and saw the girl, Ellen Braisted, limping swiftly toward him with her barbed-wire amulet loose and catching at her feet. In her hands was an axe-handle club caught up from somewhere. She struck at Chandler's head, with a face like an eagle's, impersonal and determined. The blow caught him and dazed him, and from behind someone else struck him with

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something else. He went down.

He heard shouts and firing, but he was stunned. He felt himself dragged and dropped. He saw a cloudy, misty girl's face hanging over him; it receded and returned. Then a frightful blistering pain in his hand startled him back into full consciousness.

It was the girl, Ellen, still there, leaning over him and, oddly, weeping. And the pain in his hand was the burning flame of a kitchen match. Ellen was doing it, his wrist in one hand, a burning match held to it with the other.

IV

CHANDLER yelled hoarsely, jerking his hand away.

She dropped the match and jumped up, stepping on the flame and watching him. She had a butcher knife that had been caught between her elbow and her body while she burned him. Now she put her hand on the knife, waiting. "Does it hurt?" she demanded tautly.

Chandler howled, with incredulity and rage: "God damn it, yes! What did you expect?"

"I expected it to hurt," she agreed. She watched him for a moment more and then, for the first time since he had seen her, she smiled. It was a small smile, but a beginning. A fusillade of shots from outside wiped it away at once. "Sorry," she said. "I had to do that. Please trust me."

"*Why* did you have to burn my hand?"

"House rules," she said. "Keeps the flame-spirits out, you know. They can't stand pain." She took her hand off the knife warily. "It still hurts, doesn't it?"

"It still does, yes," nodded Chandler bitterly, and she lost interest in him and got up, looking about the room. Three of the Orphalese were dead, or seemed to be from the casual poses in which they lay draped across a chair on the floor. Some of the others might have been freshly wounded, though it was hard to tell the casualties from the others in view of the Orphalese custom of self-inflicted pain. There was still firing going on outside and overhead, and a shooting-gallery smell of burnt powder in the air. The girl, Ellen Braisted, limped back with the butcher knife held carelessly in one hand. She was followed by the teen-ager, who wore a smile of triumph — and, Chandler noticed for the first time, a sort of tourniquet of barbed-wire on her left forearm, the flesh puffy red around it. "Whopped 'em," she said with glee, and pointed a .22 rifle at Chandler.

Ellen Braisted said, "Oh, he— *Meggie*, I mean, he's all right."

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She pointed at his burned palm. Meg approached him with competent care, the rifle resting on her good right forearm and aimed at him as she examined his burn. She pursed her lips and looked at his face. "All right, Ellen, I guess he's clean. But you want to burn 'em deeper'n that. Never pays to go easy, just means we'll have to do something else to 'im tomorrow."

"The hell you will," thought Chandler, and all but said it; but reason stopped him. In Rome he would have to do Roman deeds. Besides, maybe their ideas worked. Besides, he had until tomorrow to make up his mind about what he wanted to do.

"Ellen, show him around," ordered the teen-ager. "I got no time myself. Shoosh! Almost got us that time, Ellen. Got to be more careful, cause the white-handed aren't clean, you know." She strutted away, the rifle at trail. She seemed to be enjoying herself very much.

THE name of the girl in the barbed-wire bracelet was Ellen Braisted. She came from Lehigh County, Pennsylvania, and Chandler's first wonder was what she was doing nearly three thousand miles from home.

Nobody liked to travel much these days. One place was as bad as another, except that in the place where you were known you could perhaps count on friends and as a stranger you were probable fair game anywhere else. Of course, there was one likely reason for travel.

She didn't like to talk about it, that was clear, but that was the reason. She had been possessed. When the teen-ager trapped her car the day before she had been the tool of another's will. She had had a dozen submachine guns in the trunk and she had meant to deliver them to a party of hunters in a valley just south of McGuire's Mountain. Chandler said, with some effort, "I must have been —"

"*Ellen,* I must have been," she corrected.

"Ellen, I must have been possessed too, just now. When I grabbed the gun."

"Of course. First time?"

He shook his head. For some reason the brand on his forehead began to throb.

"Well, then you know. Look out here, now."

They were at the great pier windows that looked out over the valley. Down below was the river, an arc of the railroad tracks, the wooded mountainside he had scaled. "Over there, Chandler." She was pointing to the railroad bridge.

Wispy gray smoke drifted off southward toward the stream.

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The freight train Chandler had ridden on had been stopped, all that time, in the middle of the bridge. The explosion that blew out their windows had occurred when another train plowed into it — evidently at high speed. It seemed that one of the trains had carried some sort of chemicals. The bridge was a twisted mess.

"A diversion, Chandler," said Ellen Braisted. "They wanted us looking that way. Then they attacked from up the mountain."

"Who?"

Ellen looked surprised. "The men that crashed the trains . . . if they *are* men. The ones who possessed me — and you — and the hunters. They don't like these Orphalese, I think. Maybe they're a little afraid of them. I think the Orphalese have a pretty good idea of how to fight them."

Chandler felt a sudden flash of sensation along his nerves. For a moment he thought he had been possessed again, and then he knew it for what it was. It was hope. "Ellen, I never thought of fighting them. I thought that was given up two years ago."

"So maybe you agree with me? Maybe you think it's worth while sticking with the Orphalese?"

Chandler allowed himself the contemplation of what hope meant. To find someone in this world who had a *plan!* Whatever the plan was. Even if it was a bad plan. He didn't think specifically of himself, or the brand on his forehead or the memory of the body of his wife. What he thought of was the prospect of thwarting — not even defeating, merely hampering or annoying was enough! — the imps, the "flame creatures," the pythons, devils, incubi or demons who had destroyed a world he had thought very fair.

"If they'll have me," he said, "I'll stick with them, all right. Where do I go to join?"

IT was not hard to join at all. Meg chattily informed him that he was already practically a member. "Chandler, we got to watch everybody strange, you know. See why, don't you? Might have a flame spirit in 'em, no fault of theirs, but look how they could mess us up. But now we know you don't, so — What do you mean, how do we know? Cause you *did* have one when you busted loose in there. Can't have two at a time, you know. Think we couldn't tell the difference?"

The interrupted meeting was resumed after the place had been tidied up and the dead buried. There had been four of the hunters, and even without their submachine guns they had succeeded in killing eight Orphalese. But it was not all loss to the Orphalese, because two of the hunters were

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still alive, though wounded, and under the rules of this chessboard the captured enemy became a friend.

Guy had suffered a broken jaw in the scuffle and another man presided, a fat youth who favored a bandaged leg. He limped to his feet, grimacing and patting his leg. "O Orphalese and brothers," he said, "we have lost friends, but we have won a test. Praise the Prophet, we will be spared to win again, and to drive the imps of fire out of our world. Meggie, you going to tie these folks up?" The girl proudly ordered one of the hunters into the spotlighted dentist's chair, another into a wing chair that was hastily moved onto the platform. The men were bleeding and hurt, but they had clearly been abandoned by their possessors. They watched with puzzlement and fear.

"Walter, they're okay now," Meg reported as others finished tying up the hunters. "Oh, wait a minute." She advanced on Chandler. "Chandler, I'm sorry. You sit down there, hear?"

Chandler suffered himself to be bound to a camp chair on the platform and Walter took a drink of wine and opened the ornate book that was before him on the rostrum.

"Meg, thanks. Guy, I hope I do this as good as you do. Let me read you a little. Let's see." He put on his steel-rimmed glasses and read:

"Much in you is still man, and much in you is not yet man, but a shapeless pigmy that walks asleep in the mist searching for its own awakening."

He closed the book, looked with satisfaction at Guy and said: "Do you understand that, new friends? They are the words of the Prophet, who men call Kahlil Gibran. For the benefit of the new folks I ought to say that he died this fleshly life quite a good number of years ago, but his vision was unclouded. Like we say, we are the sinews that batter the flame spirits but he is our soul." There was an antiphonal murmur from the audience and Walter flipped the pages again rapidly, obviously looking for a familiar passage. "People of Orphalese, here we are now. This's what he says. 'What is this that has torn our world apart? The Prophet says: "It is life in quest of life, in bodies that fear the grave." Now, honestly, nothing could be clearer than that, people of Orphalese and friends! We got something taking possession of us, see? What is it? Well, he says here, people of Orphalese and friends, 'It is a flame spirit in you ever gathering more of itself.' Now, what the heck! Nobody can blame *us* for what a flame spirit *in* us does! So the first thing we

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got to learn, friends — and people of Orphalese — is, we aren't to blame. And the second thing is, we *are* to blame!"

He turned and grinned at Chandler kindly, while the chorus of responses came from the room, "Like here," he said, "people of Orphalese, the Prophet says *everybody* is guilty. 'The murdered is not unaccountable for his own murder, and the robbed is not blameless in being robbed. The righteous is not innocent of the deeds of the wicked, and the white-handed is not clean in the doings of the felon.' You see what he's getting at? We all got to take the responsibility for *everything* — and that means we got to suffer — but we don't have to worry about any special things we did when some flame spirit or wanderer, like, took us over.

"But we do have to suffer, people of Orphalese." His expression became grim. "Our beloved founder, Guy, who's sitting there doing a little extra suffering now, was favored enough to understand these things in the very beginning, when he himself was seized by these imps. And it is all in this book! Like it says, 'Your pain is self-chosen. It is the bitter potion by which the physician within you heals your sick self.' Ponder on that, people of Orphalese — and friends. No, I mean really ponder," he explained, glancing at the bound "friends" on the platform. "We always do that for a minute. Ada there will play us some music so we can ponder."

CHANDLER shifted uncomfortably, while an old woman crippled by arthritis began fumbling a tune out of an electric organ. The burn Ellen Braisted had given him was beginning to hurt badly. If only these people were not such obvious *nuts,* he thought, he would feel a lot better about casting his lot in with them. But maybe it took lunatics to do the job. Sane people hadn't accomplished much.

And anyway he had very little choice. . . .

"Ada, that's enough," ordered the fat youth. "Meg, come on up here. People of Orphalese, now you can listen again while Meg explains to the new folks how all this got started, seeing Guy's in no condition to do it."

The teen-ager marched up to the platform and took the parade-rest position learned in some high-school debating society—in the days when there were debating societies and high schools. "Ladies and gentlemen, well, let's start at the beginning. Guy tells this better'n I do, of course, but I guess I remember it all pretty well too. I ought to. I was in on

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it and all." She grimaced and said, "Well, anyway, ladies and gentlemen — people of Orph'lese — the way Guy organized this Orphalese self-protection society was, like Walter says, he was possessed. The only difference between Guy and you and me was that he knew what to do about it, because he read the book, you see. Not that that helped him at first, when he was took over. He was really seized. Yes, people of Orph'lese, he was taken and while his whole soul and brain and body was under the influence of some foul wanderer fiend from hell he did things that, ladies and gentlemen of Orph'lese, I wouldn't want to tell you. He was a harp in the hand of the mighty, as it says. Couldn't help it, not however much he tried. Only while he was doing — the things — he happened to catch his hand in a gas flame and, well, you can see it was pretty bad." With a deprecatory smile Guy held up a twisted hand. "And, do you know, he was free of his imp right then and there! Now, Guy is a scientist, people of Orph'lese, he worked for the telephone company, and he not only had that training in the company school but he had read the book, you see, and he put two and two together. Oh, and he's my uncle, of course. I'm proud of him. I've always loved him, and even when he — when he was not one with himself, you know, when he was doing those terrible things to me, I knew it wasn't Uncle Guy that was doing them, but something else. I didn't know what, though. And when he told me he had figured out the Basic Rule, I went along with him every bit. I knew Guy wasn't wrong, and what he said was from Scripture. Imps fear pain! So we got to love it. That one I know by heart, all right: 'Could you keep your heart from wonder at the daily miracles of your life, your pain would not seem less wondrous than your joy.' That's what it says, right? So that's why we got to hurt ourselves, people of Orph'lese — and new brothers — because the wanderers don't like it when we hurt and they leave us alone. Simple's that.

"Well —" the girl's face stiffened momentarily — "I knew *I* wasn't going to be seized. So Guy and I got Else, that's the other girl he'd been doing things to, and we knew she wasn't going to be taken either. Not if the imps feared pain like Guy said, because," she said solemnly, "I want to tell you Guy hurt us pretty bad.

"And then we came out here, and found this place, and ever since then we've been adding brothers and sisters. It's been slow, of course, because not many people come this way any more,

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and we've had to kill a lot. Yes, we have. Sometimes the possessed just can't be saved, but —"

Abruptly her face changed.

Suddenly alert, her face years older, she glanced around the room. Then she relaxed . . .

And screamed.

GUY leaped up. Hoarsely, his voice almost inarticulate as he tried to talk with his broken jaw, he cried, "Wha . . . Wha's . . . *matter,* Meg?

"Uncle Guy!" she wailed. She plunged off the platform and flung herself into his arms, crying hysterically.

"*Wha*?"

She sobbed, "I could feel it! They *took* me. Guy, you promised me they couldn't!"

He shook his head, dazed, staring at her as though she were indeed possessed—still possessed, and telling him some fearful great lie to destroy his hopes. He seemed unable to comprehend what she had said. One of the hunters bellowed in stark fear: "For God's sake, untie us! Give us a chance, anyway!" Chandler yelled agreement. In one split second everyone in the room had been transmuted by terror into something less than human. No one seemed capable of any action. Slowly the plump youth who had presided moved over to the hunter bound in the dentist's chair and began to fumble blindly at the knots. Ellen Braisted dropped her head into her hands and began to shake.

The cruelty of the moment was that they had all tasted hope. Chandler writhed wildly against his ropes, his mind racing out of control. The world had become a hell for everyone, but a bearable hell until the promise of a chance to end it gave them a full sight of what their lives had been. Now that that was dashed they were far worse off than before.

Walter finished with the hunter and lethargically began to pick at Chandler's bonds. His face was slack and unseeing.

Then it, too, changed.

The plump youth stood up sharply, glanced about, and walked off the platform.

Ellen Braisted raised her face from her hands and, her eyes streaming, quietly stood up and followed. The old lady with the arthritis about-faced and limped with them. Chandler stared, puzzled, and then comprehended.

They were marching toward the corner of the room where the rifles were stacked. "Possessed!" Chandler bellowed, the words tasting of acid as they ripped out of his throat. "Stop them! You — Guy — look!" He flailed wildly at his loosened bonds, lunged, tottered and toppled, chair and all, crashingly off the platform.

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The three possessed ones did not need to hurry. They had all the time in the world. They were already reaching out for the rifles when Chandler shouted. Economically they turned, raising the butts to their shoulders, and began to fire at the Orphalese. It was a queerly frightening sight to see the arthritic organist, with a face like a relaxed executioner, take quick aim at Guy and, with a thirty-thirty shell, blow his throat out. Three shots, and the nearest three of the congregation were dead. Three more, and others went down, while the remainder turned and tried to run. It was like a slaughter of vermin. They never had a chance.

When every Orphalese except themselves was down on the floor, dead, wounded or, like Chandler, overlooked, the arthritic lady took careful aim at Ellen Braisted and the plump youth and shot them neatly in the temples. They didn't try to prevent her. With expressions that seemed almost impatient they presented their profiles to her aim.

Then the arthritic lady glanced leisurely about, fired into the stomach of a wounded man who was trying to rise, reloaded her rifle for insurance and began to search the bodies of the nearest dead. She was looking for matches. When she found them, she tugged weakly at the upholstery on a couch, swore and began methodically to rip and crumple pages out of Kahlil Gibran. When she had a heap of loose papers piled against the dais she pitched the remainder of the book out of the window, knelt and ignited the crumpled heap.

She stood watching the fire, her expression angry and impatient, tapping her foot.

The crumpled pages burned briskly. Before they died the wooden dais was beginning to catch. Laboriously the old lady toted folding chairs to pile on the blaze until it was roaring handsomely.

She watched it for several minutes, until it was a great orange pillar of fire sweeping to the ceiling, until the drapes on the wall behind were burning and the platform was a holocaust, until the noise of crackling flame and the beginning of plaster falling from the high ceiling proved that there was no likelihood of the fire going out and, indeed, no way to put it out without a complete fire department arriving on the scene at once.

The old lady's expression cleared. She nodded to herself. She then put the muzzle of the rifle in her mouth and, with her thumb, pulled the trigger that blew the top of her head off. The body fell into the flames, but it was by then already dead.

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CHANDLER had not been shot, but he was very near to roasting. Walter had released one hand and, while the possessed woman's attention was elsewhere, Chandler had worked on the other knots.

When he saw her commit suicide he redoubled his efforts. It was incredible to him that his life had been saved, and he knew that if he escaped the flames he still had nothing to live for — that blasted brief hope had broken his spirit — but his fingers had a will of their own.

He lay there, struggling, while great black clouds of smoke, orange painted from the flames, gathered under the high ceiling, while the thunder of falling lumps of plaster sounded like a child heaving volumes of the Encyclopedia Britannica down a flight of stairs, while the heat and shortage of oxygen made him breathe in violent spasms. Then he cried out sharply and stumbled to his feet. It was only a matter of moments before he was out of the house, but it was very nearly not time enough.

Behind him was a great, sustained crash. He thought it must have been the furniture on the upper floor toppling through the burned-out ceiling of the hall. He turned and looked.

It was dark, and now every window on the side of the house facing him was lighted. It was as though some mad householder had decided to equip his rooms only with orange lights, orange lights that flickered and moved. For a second Chandler thought there were still living people in the rooms — shapes moved and cavorted at the windows, as though they were gathering up possessions or waving wildly for help. But it was only the drapes, aflame, tossed about in the fierce heat.

Chandler sighed and turned away.

Pain was not a sure defense after all. Evidently it was only an annoyance to the possessors . . . whoever, or whatever, they might be. As soon as they had become suspicious they had exerted themselves and destroyed the Orphalese. He listened and looked about, but no one else moved. He had not expected anyone. He had been sure that he was the only survivor.

He began to walk down the hill toward the wrecked railway bridge, turning only when a roar told him that the roof of the house had fallen in. A tulip of flame a hundred feet tall rose above the standing walls, and above that a shower of floating red-orange sparks, heat-borne, drifting up and away and beginning to settle all over the mountainside. Many were still red when

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they landed, a few still flaming. It was a distinct risk that the trees would begin to burn, and then he would be in fresh danger. So great was his stupor that he did not even hurry.

By a plowed field he flung himself to the ground.

He could go no farther because he had nowhere to go. He had had two homes and he had been driven from both of them. He had had hope twice, and twice he had been damned.

He lay on his back, with the burning house mumbling and crackling in the distance, and stared up at the orange-lit tops of the trees and, past them, the stars. Over his left shoulder Deneb chased Vega across the sky; toward his feet something moved between the bright rosy dot that was Antares and another, the same brightness and hue—Mars? He spent several moments wondering if Mars were in that part of the heavens. Then he looked again for the tiny moving point that had crossed the claws of the Scorpion, but it was gone. A satellite, maybe. Although there were few of them left that the naked eye could hope to see. And there would never be any more, because the sort of accumulated wealth of nations that threw rockets into the sky was forever spent.

It was probably an airplane, he thought drowsily, and drifted off to sleep without realizing how remote even that possibility had become . . . He woke up to find that he was getting to his feet.

Once again an interloper tenanted his brain. He tried to interfere, for he could not help it, although he knew how useless it was, but his own neck muscles turned his head from side to side, his own eyes looked this way and that, his own hand reached down for a dead branch that lay on the ground, then hesitated and withdrew. His body stood motionless for a second, the lips moving, the larynx mumbling to itself. He could almost hear words. Chandler felt like a fly in amber, prisoned in his own brainbox. He was not surprised when his legs moved to carry him back toward the destroyed building, now a fakir's bed of white-hot coals with brush fires spattered around it. He thought he knew why. It seemed very likely that what possessor had him was a sort of clean-up squad, tidying up the loose ends of the slaughter; he expected that his body's errand was to destroy itself, and thus him, as all the Orphalese had been destroyed.

V

CHANDLER'S body carried him rapidly toward the house. Now and then it paused and

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glanced about. It seemed to be weighing some shortcut in its errand; but always it resumed its climb.

Chandler could sympathize with it, in a way. He still felt every pain from burn, brand and wound; as they neared the embers of the building the heat it threw off intensified them all. He could not be a comfortable body to inhabit for long. He was almost sympathetic because his tenant could not find a convenient weapon with which to fulfill his purpose.

When it seemed they could get no closer without the skin of his face crackling and bursting into flame his body halted.

Chandler could feel his muscles gathering for what would be the final leap into the auto-da-fe. His feet took a short step — and slipped. His body stumbled and recovered itself; his mouth swore thickly in a language he did not know.

Then his body hesitated, glanced at the ground, paused again and bent down. It had tripped on a book. It picked the book up, and Chandler saw that it was the Orphalese copy of Gibran's *The Prophet.*

Chandler's body stood poised for a moment, in an attitude of thought. Then it sat down, in the play of heat from the coals. It was a moment before Chandler realized he was free. He tested his legs; they worked; he got up, turned and began to walk away.

He had traveled no more than a few yards when he stumbled slightly, as though shifting gears, and felt the tenant in his mind again.

He continued to walk away from the building, down toward the road. Once his arm raised the book he still carried and his eyes glanced down, as if for reassurance that it was the same book. That was the only clue he was given as to what had happened and it was not much. It was as though his occupying power, whatever it was, had gone — somewhere—to think things over, perhaps to ask a question of an unimaginable companion, and then returned with an altered purpose. As time passed, Chandler began to receive additional clues, but he was in little shape to fit them together, for his body was near exhaustion.

He walked to the road, and waited, rigid, until a panel truck came bouncing along. He hailed it, his arms making a sign he did not understand, and when it stopped he addressed the driver in a language he did not speak. *"Shto,"* said the driver, a somber-faced Mexican in dungarees. *"Ja nie jestem Ruska. Czego pragniesh?"*

"Czy ty jedziesz to Los Ange-

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les?" asked Chandler's mouth.

"Nyet. Acapulco."

Chandler's voice argued, *"Wes na* Los Angeles."

"Nyet." The voices droned on. Chandler lost interest in the argument and was only relieved when it seemed somehow to be settled and he was herded into the back of the truck. The somber Mexican locked him in; he felt the truck begin to move; his tenant left him, and he was at once asleep.

He woke long enough to find himself standing in the mist of early dawn at a crossroads. In a few minutes another car came by, and his voice talked earnestly with the driver for a moment. Chandler got in, was released, slept again and woke to find himself free and abandoned, sprawled across the back seat of the car, which was parked in front of a building marked Los Angeles International Airport.

CHANDLER got out of the car and strolled around, stretching. He realized he was very hungry.

No one was in sight. The field showed clear signs of having been through the same sort of destruction that had visited every major communications facility in the world. Part of the building before him was smashed flat and showed signs of having been burned. He saw projecting aluminum members, twisted and scorched but still visibly aircraft parts. Apparently a transport had crashed into the building. Burned-out cars littered the parking lot and what had once been a green lawn. They seemed to have been bulldozed out of the way, but not an inch farther than was necessary to clear the approach roads.

To his right, as he stared out onto the field, was a strange-looking construction on three legs, several stories high. It did not seem to serve any useful purpose. Perhaps it had been a sort of luxury restaurant at one time, like the Space Needle from the old Seattle Fair, but now it too was burned out and glassless in its windows. The field itself was swept bare except for two or three parked planes in the bays, but he could see wrecked transports lining the approach strips. All in all, Los Angeles International Airport appeared to be serviceable, but only just.

He wondered where all the people were.

Distant truck noises answered part of the question. An Army six by six came bumping across a bridge that led from the takeoff strips to this parking area of the airport. Five men got out next to one of the ships. They glanced at him but did not speak as they began loading crates of some sort

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of goods from the truck into the aircraft, a four-engine, swept-wing jet of what looked to Chandler like an obsolete model. Perhaps it was one of the early Boeings. There hadn't been many of those in use at the time the troubles began, too big and fast for short hops, too slow to compete over long distances with the rockets. But, of course, with all the destruction, and with no new aircraft being built anywhere in the world any more, no doubt they were as good as could be found.

The truckmen did not seem to be possessed; they worked with the normal amount of grunting and swearing, pausing to wipe sweat away or to scratch an itch. They showed neither the intense malevolent concentration nor the wide-eyed idiot curiosity of those whose bodies were no longer their own. Chandler settled the woolen cap over the brand on his forehead, to avoid unpleasantness, and drifted over toward them.

They stopped work and regarded him. One of them said something to another, who nodded and walked toward Chandler. "What do you want?" he demanded warily.

"I don't know. I was going to ask you the same question, I guess."

The man scowled. "Didn't your exec tell you what to do?"

"My what?"

The man paused, scratched and shook his head. "Well, stay away from us. This is an important shipment, see? I guess you're all right or you couldn't've got past the guards, but I don't want you messing us up. Got enough trouble already. I don't know why," he said in the tones of an old grievance, "we can't get the execs to let us *know* when they're going to bring somebody in. It wouldn't hurt them! Now here we got to load and fuel this ship and, for all I know, you've got half a ton of junk around somewhere that you're going to load onto it. How do I know how much fuel it'll take? No weather, naturally. So if there's headwinds it'll take full tanks, but if there's extra cargo I —"

"The only cargo I brought with me that I can think of is a book," said Chandler. "Weighs maybe a pound. You think I'm supposed to get on that plane?"

The man grunted non-committally.

"All right, suit yourself. Listen, is there any place I can get something to eat?"

The man considered. "Well, I guess we can spare you a sandwich. But you wait here. I'll bring it to you."

He went back to the truck. A moment later one of the others brought Chandler two cold ham-

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burgers wrapped in waxed paper, but would answer no questions.

CHANDLER ate every crumb, sought and found a washroom in the wrecked building, came out again and sat in the sun, watching the loading crew. He had become quite a fatalist. It did not seem that it was intended he should die immediately, so he might as well live.

There were large gaps in his understanding, but it seemed clear to Chandler that these men, though not possessed, were in some way working for the possessors. It was a distasteful concept; but on second thought it had reassuring elements. It was evidence that whatever the "execs" were, they were very possibly human beings — or, if not precisely human, at least shared the human trait of working by some sort of organized effort toward some sort of a goal. It was the first non-random phenomenon he had seen in connection with the possessors, barring the short-term tactical matters of mass slaughter and destruction. It made him feel — what he tried at once to suppress, for he feared another destroying frustration — a touch of hope.

The men finished their work but did not leave. Nor did they approach Chandler, but sat in the shade of their truck, waiting for something. He drowsed and was awakened by a distant sputter of a single-engined Aerocoupe that hopped across the building behind him, turned sharply and came down with a brisk little run in the parking bay itself.

From one side the pilot climbed down and from the other two men lifted, with great care, a wooden crate, small but apparently heavy. They stowed it in the jet while the pilot stood watching; then the pilot and one of the other men got into the crew compartment. Chandler could not be sure, but he had the impression that the truckman who entered the plane was no longer his own master. His movements seemed more sure and confident, but above all it was the mute, angry eyes with which his fellows regarded him that gave Chandler grounds for suspicion. He had no time to worry about that; for in the same breath he felt himself occupied once more.

He did not rise. His own voice said to him, "You. Votever you name, you fellow vit de book! You go get de book verever you pud it and get on dat ship dere, you see?" His eyes turned toward the waiting aircraft. "And don't forget de book!"

He was released. "I won't," he said automatically, and then realized that there was no longer anyone there to hear his answer.

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When he retrieved the Gibran volume from the car and approached the plane the loading crew said nothing. Evidently they knew what he was doing — either because they too had been given instructions, or because they were used to such things. He paused at the wheeled stairs. "Listen," he said, "can you at least tell me where I'm going?"

The four remaining men looked at him silently, with the same angry, worried expression he had seen on their faces before. They did not answer, but after a moment one of them raised his arm and pointed.

West. Out toward the Pacific. Out toward some ten million square miles of nearly empty sea.

LONG before they reached their destination Chandler had reasoned what it must be. He was correct: It was the islands of Hawaii.

Chandler knew that the pilot and his coopted partner were up forward, in the crew compartment, but the door was locked and he never saw them again. Apart from them he was the only living person on the plane.

The plane was lightly loaded with cargo of unidentifiable sorts. In the rear section, where once tourist-class passengers had eaten their complimentary tray meals and planned their vacations, the seats had been removed and a thin scatter of crates and boxes were strapped to the floor. In the luxury of the forward section Chandler sat, stared at the water and drowsed. He seemed to be always sleepy. Perhaps it was the consequence of his exertions; more likely it was a psychological phenomenon. He was beyond worry. He had reached that point in emotional fatigue when the sudden rattle of cannonfire or the enemy's banzai charge can no longer flood the blood with adrenalin. The glands are dry. The emotions have been triggered too often. Battle fatigue takes men in many different ways, but in Chandler it was only apathy. He not only could not worry, he could not even rouse himself to feel hunger, although the pricking of habit made him get up and search the flight kitchen, unsuccessfully, for food.

He had no idea how much time had passed when the hiss of the jets changed key.

The horizon dipped below the wingtip and straightened again, and he beheld land. He never saw the airfield, only water, then beach, then water again, then a few buildings. Then there was a roar of jets, with their clamshells deflecting their thrust forward to brake their speed, and then the wheels were on the ground. As the plane stopped he felt himself

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once more possessed. It was no longer terrifying—though Chandler was sure he was doomed.

Without knowing where he was going or why he picked up the ripped book, opened the cabin exit and stepped down onto the rolling steps that had immediately been brought into place. He was conscious of a horde of men swarming around the plane, stripping it of its cargo, and wondered briefly at the rush; but he could not stop to watch them, his legs carried him swiftly across a paved strip to where a police car was cruising.

Chandler cringed inside, instinctively, but his body did not falter as it stepped into the path of the car and raised its hand.

The police car jammed on its brakes. The policeman at the wheel, Chandler thought inside himself, looked startled, but he also looked resigned. "To de South Gate, qvickly," said Chandler's lips, and he felt his legs carry him around to the door on the other side.

There was another policeman on the seat next to the driver. He leaped like a hare to get the door open and get out before Chandler's body got there. He made it with nothing to stare. "Jack, you go on, I'll tell Headquarters," he said hurriedly. The driver nodded without speaking. His lips were white. He reached over Chandler to close the door and made a sharp U-turn.

As soon as the car was moving Chandler felt himself able to move his lips again.

"I—" he said. "I don't know—"

"Friend," said the policeman, "kindly keep your mouth shut. 'South Gate,' the exec said, and South Gate is where I'm going."

Chandler shrugged and looked out the window . . . just in time to see the jet that had brought him to the islands once more lumbering into life. It crept, wobbling its wingtips, over the ground, picked up speed, roared across taxi strips and over rough ground and at last piled up against an ungainly looking foreign airplane, a Russian jet by its markings, in a thunderous crash and ball of flame as its fuel exploded. No one got out.

It seemed that traffic to Hawaii was all one way.

VI

THEY roared through downtown Honolulu with the siren blaring and cars scattering out of the way. At seventy miles an hour they raced down a road by the sea. Chandler caught a glimpse of a sign that said "Hilo," but where or what "Hilo" might be he had no idea. Soon there were fewer cars; then there were none but their own.

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The road was a surburban highway lined with housing developments, shopping centers, palm groves and the occasional center of a small municipality, scattering helterskelter together. There was a road like this extending in every direction from every city in the United States, Chandler thought; but this one was somewhat altered. Something had been there before them. About a mile outside Honolulu's outer fringe, life was cut off as with a knife. There were no people on foot, and the only cars were rusted wrecks lining the roads. The lawns were ragged stands of weeds in front of the ranch-type homes.

It was evidently not allowed to live here.

Chandler craned his neck. His curiosity was becoming almost unbearable. He opened his mouth, but, "I said, "Shut up.' " rumbled the cop without looking at him. There was a note in the policeman's voice that impressed Chandler. He did not quite know what it was, but it made him obey. They drove for another fifteen minutes in silence, then drew up before a barricade across the road.

Chandler got out. The policeman slammed the door behind him, ripping rubber off his tires with the speed of his U-turn and acceleration back toward Honolulu. He did not look at Chandler.

Chandler stood staring off after him, in bright warm sunlight with a reek of hibiscus and rotting palms in his nostril. It was very quiet there, except for a soft scratchy sound of footsteps on gravel. As Chandler turned to face the man who was coming toward him, he realized he had learned one fact from the policeman after all. The cop was scared clear through.

Chandler said, "Hello," to the man who was approaching.

He too wore a uniform, but not that of the Honolulu city police. It was like U.S. Army suntans, but without insignia. Behind him were half a dozen others in the same dress, smoking, chatting, leaning against whatever was handy. The barricades themselves were impressively thorough. Barbed wire ran down the beach and out into the ocean; on the other side of the road, barbed wire ran clear out of sight along the middle of a side road. The gate itself was bracketed with machine-gun emplacements.

The guard waited until he was close to Chandler before speaking. "What do you want?" he asked without greeting. Chandler shrugged. "All right, just wait here," said the guard, and began to walk away again.

"Wait a minute! What am I waiting for?" The guard shook

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his head without stopping or turning. He did not seem very interested, and he certainly was not helpful.

Chandler put down the copy of *The Prophet* which he had carried so far and sat on the ground, but again he had no long time to wait. One of the guards came toward him, with the purposeful movements Chandler had learned to recognize. Without speaking the guard dug into a pocket. Chandler jumped up instinctively, but it was only a set of car keys.

As Chandler took them the look in the guard's eyes showed the quick release of tension that meant he was free again; and in that same moment Chandler's own body was occupied once more.

He reached down and picked up the book. Quickly, but a little clumsily, his fingers selected a key, and his legs carried him toward a little French car parked just the other side of the barrier.

CHANDLER was learning at last the skills of allowing his body to have its own way. He couldn't help it in any event, so he was consciously disciplining himself to withdraw his attention from his muscles and senses. It involved queerly vertiginous problems. A hundred times a minute there was some unexpected body sway or movement of the hand, and his lagging, imprisoned mind would wrench at its unresponsive nerves to put out the elbow that would brace him, or to catch itself with a step. He had learned to ignore these things. The mind that inhabited his body had ways not his own of maintaining balance and reaching an objective, but they were equally sure.

He watched his own hands shifting the gears of the car. It was a make he had never driven, with a clutchless drive he did not understand, but the mind in his brain evidently understood it well enough. They picked up speed in great, gasoline-wasting surges.

Chandler began to form a picture of that mind. It belonged to an older man, from the hesitancy of its walk, and a testy one, from the heedless crash of the gears as it shifted. It drove with careless slapdash speed. Chandler's mind yelled and flinched in his brain as they rounded blind curves, where any casual other motorist would have been a catastrophe; but the hand on the wheel and the foot on the accelerator did not hesitate.

Beyond the South Gate the island of Oahu became abruptly wild.

There were beautiful homes, but there were also great, gap-toothed spaces where homes had

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once been and were no longer. It seemed that some monstrous Zoning Commissar had stalked through the island with an eraser, rubbing out the small homes, the cheap ones, the old ones; rubbing out the stores, rubbing out the factories. This whole section of the island had been turned into an exclusive residential park.

It was not uninhabited. Chandler thought he glimpsed a few people, though since the direction of his eyes was not his to control it was hard to be sure. And then the Renault turned into a lane, paved but narrow. Hardwood trees with some sort of blossoms, Chandler could not tell what, overhung it on both sides.

It meandered for a mile or so, turned and opened into a great vacant parking lot. The Renault stopped with a squeal of brakes in front of a door that was flanked by bronze plaques: *TWA Flight Message Center.*

Chandler caught sight of a skeletal towering form overhead, like a radio transmitter antenna, as his body marched him inside, up a motionless escalator, along a hall and into a room.

His muscles relaxed.

He glanced around and, from a huge couch beside a desk, a huge soft body stirred and, gasping, sat up. It was a very fat old man, almost bald, wearing a coronet of silvery spikes.

He looked at Chandler without much interest. "Vot's your name?" he wheezed. He had a heavy, ineradicable accent, like a Hapsburg or a Russian diplomat. Chandler recognized it readily. He had heard it often enough, from his own lips.

THE man's name was Koitska, he said in his accented wheeze. If he had another name he did not waste it on Chandler. He took as few words as possible to order Chandler to be seated and to be still.

Koitska squinted at the copy of Gibran's *The Prophet.* He did not glance at Chandler, but Chandler felt himself propelled out of his seat, to hand the book to Koitska, then returning. Koitska turned its remaining pages with an expression of bored repugnance, like a man picking off his arm. He seemed to be waiting for something.

A door closed on the floor below, and in a moment a girl came into the room.

She was tall, dark and not quite young. Chandler, struck by her beauty, was sure that he had seen her, somewhere, but could not place her face. She wore a coronet like the fat man's, intertwined in a complicated hairdo, and she got right down to business. "Chandler, is it? All right, love, what we want to know is

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what this is all about." She indicated the book.

A relief that was like pain crossed Chandler's mind. So that was why he was here! Whoever these people were, however they managed to rule men's minds, they were not quite certain of their perfect power. To them the sad, futile Orphalese represented a sort of annoyance — not important enough to be a threat — but something which had proved inconvenient at one time and therefore needed investigating. As Chandler was the only survivor they had deemed it worth their godlike whiles to transport him four thousand miles so that he might satisfy their curiosity.

Chandler did not hesitate in telling them all about the people of Orphalese. There was nothing worth concealing, he was quite sure. No debts are owed to the dead; and the Orphalese had proved on their own heads, at the last, that their ritual of pain was only an annoyance to the possessors, not a tactic that could long be used against them.

It took hardly five minutes to say everything that needed saying about Guy, Meggie and the other doomed and suffering inhabitants of the old house on the mountain.

Koitska hardly spoke. The girl was his interrogator, and sometimes translator as well, when his English was not sufficient to comprehend a point. With patient detachment she kept the story moving until Koitska with a bored shrug indicated he was through.

Then she smiled at Chandler and said, "Thanks, love. Haven't I seen you somewhere before?"

"I don't know. I thought the same thing about you."

"Oh, everybody's seen me. Lots of me. But — well, no matter. Good luck, love. Be nice to Koitska and perhaps he'll do as much for you." And she was gone.

Koitska lay unmoving on his couch for a few moments, rubbing a fat nose with a plump finger. "Hah," he said at last. Then, abruptly, "And now, de qvestion is, vot to do vit you, eh? I do not t'ink you can cook, eh?"

WITH unexpected clarity Chandler realized he was on trial for his life. "Cook? No, I'm afraid not. I mean, I can boil eggs," he said. "Nothing fancy."

"Hah," grumbled Koitska. "Vel. Ve need a couple, three doctors, but I do not t'ink you vould do."

Chandler shook his head. "I'm an electrical engineer," he said. "Or was."

"Vas?"

"I haven't had much practice. There has not been a great deal of call for engineers, the last year or two."

"Hah." Koitska seemed to con-

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sider. "Vel," he said, "it could be . . . yes, it could be dat ve have a job for you. You go back downstairs and — no, vait." The fat man closed his eyes and Chandler felt himself seized and propelled down the stairs to what had once been a bay of a built-in garage. Now it was fitted up with workbenches and the gear of a radio ham's dreams.

Chandler walked woodenly to one of the benches. His own voice spoke to him. "Ve got here someplace — *da,* here is cirguit diagrams and de specs for a sqvare-vave generator. You know vot dat is? Write down de answer." Chandler, released with a pencil in his hand and a pad before him, wrote *Yes.* "Okay. Den you build vun for me. I areddy got vun but I vant another. You do dis in de city, not here. Go to Tripler, dey tells you dere vere you can work, vere to get parts, all dat. Couple days you come out here again, I see if I like how you build."

Clutching the thick sheaf of diagrams, Chandler felt himself propelled outside and back into the little car. The interview was over.

He wondered if he would be able to find his way back to Honolulu, but that problem was then postponed as he discovered he could not start the car. His own hands had already done so, of course, but it had been so quick and sure that he had not paid attention; now he found that the ignition key was marked only in French, which he could not speak. After trial and error he discovered the combination that would start the engine and unlock the steering wheel, and then gingerly he toured the perimeter of the lot until he found an exit road.

It was close to midnight, he judged. Stars were shining overhead; there was a rising moon. He then remembered, somewhat tardily, that he should not be seeing stars. The lane he had come in on had been overhung on both sides with trees.

A few minutes later he realized he was quite lost.

Chandler stopped the car, swore feelingly, got out and looked around.

There was nothing much to see. The roads bore no markers that made sense to him. He shrugged and rummaged through the glove compartment on the chance of a map; there was none, but he did find what he had almost forgotten, a half-empty pack of cigarettes. It had been — he counted — nearly a week since he had smoked. He lit up.

IT was a pleasant evening, too. He felt almost relaxed.

He stood there, wondering just

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what might be about to happen next — with curiosity more than fear — and then he felt a light touch at his mind.

It was nothing, really. Or nothing that he could quite identify. It was though he had been nudged. It seemed that someone was about to usurp his body again, but that did not develop.

As he had about decided to forget it and get back in the car he saw headlights approaching.

A low, lean sports car slowed as it came near, stopping beside him, and a girl leaned out, almost invisible in the darkness. "There you are, love," she said cheerfully. "Thought I spotted someone. Lost?"

She had a coronet, and Chandler recognized her. It was the girl who had interrogated him. "I guess I am," he admitted.

The girl leaned forward. "Come in, dear. Oh, that thing? Leave it here, the silly little bug." She giggled as they drove away from the Renault. "Koitska wouldn't like you wandering around. I guess he decided to give you a job?"

"How did you know?"

She said softly, "Well, love, you're here, you know. Otherwise — never mind. What are you supposed to be doing?"

"Going to Tripler, whatever that is. In Honolulu, I guess. Then I have to build some radio equipment."

"Tripler's actually on the other side of the city. I'll take you to the gate; then you tell them where you want to go. They'll take care of it."

"I don't have any money for fare."

She laughed. After a moment she said, "Koitska's not the worst. But I'd mind my step if I were you, love. Do what he says, the best you can. You never know. You might find yourself very fortunate . . ."

"I already think that. I'm alive."

"Why, love, that point of view will take you far." The sports car slid smoothly to a stop at the barricade and, in the floodlights above the machine-gun nests, she looked more closely at Chandler. "What's that on your forehead, dear?"

Somehow the woolen cap had been lost. "A brand," he said shortly. " 'H' for 'hoaxer.' I did something when one of you people had me, and they thought I'd done it on my own."

"Why — why, this is wonderful!" the girl said excitedly. "No wonder I thought I'd seen you before. Don't you remember? I was in the forewoman at your trial!"

— FREDERIK POHL

TO BE CONCLUDED

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Robert was always there. He had to be. He didn't have anywhere else to go.

By MARGARET ST. CLAIR

Illustrated by RITTER

ROBERTA

ROBERT leaned on one of the clouds and said, reproachfully, "You're far too aggressive, dear."

"I know," Roberta answered in a small voice.

"It shows in everything you do," Robert continued. "Your voice, the way you walk, everything. You'd better watch out for it. It will get you in trouble some day . . . besides spoiling the illusion."

Roberta drew breath in a little gasp. Robert smiled. "What's the matter, anyhow?" he asked. "Are you still envious of other women, Roberta? You oughtn't to be. Now that we're, well, married. And everything."

"*Are* we really married?" Roberta wanted to know. "It seems to me . . . sometimes . . . that I used to be happier."

"Hush. Be quiet." Robert seemed about to chin himself on a cloud and then thought better of it. "Of course you're happy."

He leaned his elbows on the pinkest of the cloud bands and smiled at Roberta benevolently. He looked, Roberta thought, like a picture Roberta had had taken when Roberta was little, as a little Roberta cherub. Ever so pretty. (Are cherubs boys or girls?)

The buzzer on the vizi-screen at the foot of the big sunken tub (Robert always seemed to show up when Roberta was taking a bath) rang harshly. Roberta clam-

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bered out of the tub, picked up a towel with one hand, and with the other pressed a switch. The face of the receptionist on duty at the desk in the lobby became visible.

"A Mr. Rodvorello Dlag to see you, Miss Prentice," said the receptionist. "R-o-d-v-o-r-e-l-l-o D-l-a-g. He says he knows you. Shall I send him up?"

Roberta's eyebrows arched doubtfully. "Rov—? Rob—?" But a glance at the ceiling showed that Robert had gone. He might have gone into one of the closets, which was a good place for a skeleton to hide itself. More likely he had pulled a cloud in after him. Cuckoo Robert. Like a cuckoo in a clock.

"Oh, have him come on up," Roberta told the image of the receptionist's face. "In about twenty minutes. Even if I don't remember him."

ROBERT and Roberta were waltzing around and around, with Roberta's long pink tulle skirt whirling out behind, when Mr. Dlag knocked.

Robert went away. Roberta went to the door.

Mr. Dlag was an extraordinary looking man. Roberta, peering at him, tried to remember where people who looked like that came from. He was wearing a buttonhole flower made of brown feathers, extremely large synthetic opal cufflinks, and a suit of unusually garish iridi-tweed. His manners, though, were excellent.

"And how are you now, ah, Miss Prentice?" he asked when they were both seated. "Quite recovered from your operation? Well and happy, I trust?"

"Yes, I'm feeling well," Roberta admitted.

"Good! I'm glad to hear it," Mr. Dlag declared. His eyes, coal-black against the deep whiteness of his skin, twinkled. "It wasn't any trouble for me. Just a question of exerting a little influence in the right quarters. And if it made you happy—well! Any time I'm too busy to help out a friend, I'll leave Earth."

"Awfully good of you," murmured Roberta, who hadn't the foggiest idea what he was talking about.

Mr. Dlag nodded. "I came to bring you your ticket," he said. "You remember our little agreement, of course. Here it is." He extended an envelope.

Roberta opened it. Inside there was a very long ticket for Vega. One way, on the *S.S. Thor,* Amsonia Star Lines.

Vega. So that was where Mr. Dlag was from. Vega. Why hadn't Roberta realized it before? And was he, like other Vegans, a passionate collector? Was his collection what he went on living for?

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"How's your collection, Mr. Dlag?" Roberta asked brightly.

Mr. Dlag frowned. "Dear Miss Prentice," he said, "I thought you understood. You won't be subject to annoyance in any way. You're to stay on Needr—that's the Vegan planet—only a couple of months. You *will* be a part of my collection, of course. But you won't be aware of it."

"You must have a very unusual collection, Mr. Dlag," Roberta said.

Mr. Dlag seemed to expand with pleasure. "I flatter myself, it *is* an unusual idea," he cried. "Other Vegans collect postage stamps, or coins, or obsolete radio sets. *I* collect imitation things.

"That was what interested me most, you know, when I came to Earth—realizing how many Earth things were imitations. Insects that imitate other insects. Plants that imitate other plants. Animals that imitate plants. Plants that imitate rocks. And half your artifacts imitate other things. It's amazing. There are almost no imitation things on Needr, my home."

ROBERTA had folded up the ticket and was putting it away in a handbag. At the bottom of the handbag there was a little gun. It had been Robert's birthday gift. (How had he got it? Sliver guns were strictly illegal. But Robert could do all sorts of things.)

"That's very interesting," Roberta murmured. "I'm not quite clear, though, Mr. Rov—Rob—Mr. Dlag, how I fit into your collection."

Once more Mr. Dlag frowned. "I thought you understood. Well —" he smiled deprecatingly— "you see, Miss Prentice, you're by way of being an imitation yourself."

"An imitation?" Roberta echoed. It was odd, at that word, how much Mr. Dlag had begun to resemble Robert. Robert, who usually sat in the sky on a pink cloud.

"Yes. Because of your operation, you know. You're an imitation woman now, Miss Prentice. That's why I helped you with getting it."

Roberta pulled the sliver gun out of the handbag and shot Vegan-Robert in the forehead with it.

Since the forehead is in close proximity to the brain, Robert died almost immediately. Roberta's mouth could not help coming open.

Oh, dear.

Oh, dear indeed. For killing Robert was about as naughty a thing as it was possible to do. Naughty, naughty. Naughty. Left Roberta hand slapped right Roberta hand—the one with the

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sliver gun—hard and repeatedly. Naughty hand. It deserved to be hurt.

But now what was to be done? The big mahogany chest in the bedroom was empty, except for the plasti-mink coat Roberta had ben planning to wear when the weather got cold. Roberta took the coat out and hung it on a hanger in the closet. Then, catching Vegan-Robert by the back of the jacket collar and the seat of his synthi-tweed pants, Roberta tugged him over to the chest and tumbled him in. The lid closed down on him with a neat bang.

There.

Having killed Robert was very naughty, certainly. But now that he *was* dead—well, it was rather nice to have him gone permanently.

Something seemed to have happened to time. It alternately caught and then went forward in big jerks, like a tape that sticks in the machine. Roberta put on makeup; it took hours, though it was only five minutes by the clock. Then it was after eleven, with nothing happening in between at all, and time for the injection. And bed.

ROBERTA sterilized the syringe in alcohol; it was easier than boiling it in water. The needle went into the tip of the sterile ampoule and sucked up fluid. Cotton scoured a spot on one plump thigh.

"Theelin," Robert said from a purplish cloud bank. "An extract of the female hormones. Your regular glandular therapy, designed to make you a little more . . . what you're trying to be."

Roberta's heart gave a terrific bound. "Go away. Go away. You're in the chest. You can't be here. You're dead."

"There's somebody in the chest, certainly," Robert said with a judicial air. "Who it is is another matter. I rather doubt it's me.

"You may be able to get away with it. Lewd Vegan, corruptor of innocent terrestrial youth, slain by heartbroken victim — that sort of thing. 'M, yes. But for God's sake, Roberta, don't kill anybody else. Mind, now." He disappeared.

Time gave another jerk and it was morning. Roberta couldn't be said not to have slept, since there had been no time to sleep in. But what had been on the agenda at midnight was still there now that it was morning—how to make Robert go away and stay away.

Well. If there weren't any Robert, there wouldn't be any Roberta. Would there, now?

Sleeping pills? There weren't nearly enough of them. There wasn't any gas in the kitchenette. The bridges were a long way off to jump from. And a hanging

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weight would break down the chandelier. But in the drawer in the kitchen there was a knife.

Roberta drew the paring knife lightly over one wrist. It hurt. It would hurt an awful lot, really. But it might hurt . . . somebody else worse.

Roberta was making a second attempt when the buzzer on the vizi-screen rang. The noise was startlingly loud and harsh. Roberta jumped so hard that the paring knife shot out of the inflicting hand, into the sink and down into the garbage reduction unit, which happened—but how odd!—which somehow happened to be turned on.

The knife was chewed up almost immediately. The buzzer went on ringing.

IT was the clerk at the desk in the lobby again, and she had another caller for Miss Prentice.

Clement Thomas was a small, slight man, quite ordinary except for his eyes, which were green, bright and *interesting*. He said he wanted to see Miss Prentice for a few moments about a personal matter.

They talked about the weather for a while, and then Mr. Thomas (like what's-his-name yesterday) said he hoped Miss Prentice was feeling well and happy.

"Yes," said Roberta.

"That's good news," said Mr. Thomas. He cleared his throat. "You know, Miss Prentice, there's been a recession— depression— whatever they're calling it now. Times have been rather bad for me professionally."

"Bad for other people too," said Roberta, thinking of Mr. Dlag in the chest.

"Yes, I suppose." Once more Mr. Thomas cleared his throat. "And of course I've been somewhat distressed by thinking about our professional, hum, association. As you know, the operation I performed on you was strictly illegal, though it was performed at your urgent request. If I were to go to the authorities, I could clear my conscience . . . and no doubt get off with a light sentence. But that would mean trouble for *you*." Mr. Thomas cocked his head and simpered engagingly.

Oper—? "There's nothing so terrible about an abortion," Roberta answered.

"Abortions?" Mr. Thomas seemed startled. His simper disappeared. It looked, Roberta thought, as if the mask he had on over his face was getting thin. He laughed. "An abortion, my dear, is something you'll never need. Never in this world."

He started to laugh again, and checked himself. "*Don't* you remember?" he said to Roberta, who was fidgeting with the clasp of the handbag and wondering who Mr.

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Thomas really was, under his mask. "Honestly, don't you remember? You came to me six months or so ago, recommended by a certain, hum, alien, and asked for my professional services. Your name was Robert Bayliss then. You had me perform a sex-reversal op—"

This time there was no possible doubt. He wasn't Clement Thomas, he was Robert. The person sitting opposite surgeon-Robert shot him in the throat.

Since the throat is further from the brain than the forehead is, it took Robert No. 2 quite a lot longer to die than it had taken Mr. Dlag, yesterday. Sliver-gun darts act directly on the nervous system. Robert tied himself up in convulsion after convulsion, horrid masculine knots, before he relaxed finally. But there. He was dead.

Roberta put Robert in the chest beside yesterday's Robert. It was a tight fit. There was trouble with the lid.

The bodies were still being wrestled with when, on a bank of black clouds very low down on the ceiling, Robert appeared. He looked angry. "I told you not to," he said.

Roberta, trying yet again to make Mr. Dlag's left arm bend backwards, made no reply. Robert, chewing on his lower lip, ascended slowly to the zenith of the ceiling. "Don't waste time with that," he said at last. "You can't possibly get away with it. Get your suitcases, Roberta, and start packing. Hurry up."

"But, Robert—"

"Yes?"

"Why do I have to go away? I like this place."

"What are you using for a brain? If we want to go on living even a little longer, we're going to have to run. And run."

He disappeared, drawing the black cloud in after him. Roberta remained staring up at the ceiling, head thrown back, Adam's apple prominent.

WHAT was the use of hoping any longer? No matter where they went—Venus, Vega, Arcturus, even M 31—it would be the same. Robert would go along with Roberta.

Roberta's jaw set. No, that wasn't quite true. After Mr. Dlag had died, Robert had been dead for a little while. It might be a matter of keeping on trying.

If you killed people enough, you would—it was reasonable, wasn't it?—you would get through all the masks they wore to the person behind them. At last. To the one you had always tried to destroy. To *him*.

"I'll kill you yet, Robert," Roberta said between his teeth.

—MARGARET ST. CLAIR

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Bimmie says people are stupid. Bimmie says he can help them — but they're not really worth his trouble, Bimmie says!

Bimmie Says

By SYDNEY VAN SCYOC

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June 27, 1982 Bimmie said to do this, keep a diary. I said, Cows? He said, You deaf, woman? A book! Then I remembered, only I haven't seen one. It's for when he's famous. Then we can have it published anytime we need money.

I'd better tell about us. I'm short, sort of cute, and I cook good. Bimmie's tall and skinny, he likes to eat. He's 18, I'm 16. We got married 22 days ago. Instead of a fancy wedding, Bimmie told my folks, Give us money.

He needed the money for his laboratory. It's in the basement. It's what'll make him famous.

June 31, 1982 We got a cat and dog. They're black and two months old. I wanted red collars. Bimmie said, Don't waste my money, woman.

Bimmie wanted them down in his laboratory. He said that'd be proper conditions. I said, No, I'll leave if you do and you'll have to eat capsules.

The cat's he, the dog's she. Bimmie doesn't want them outside, ever.

July 3, 1982 We thought Bimmie's folks'd change their minds. But they said, Finally and conclusively, we won't. Bimmie says he doesn't want to go to college if they're stingy because we got married. He already knows everything important.

He wants me to finish school. I can finish in December. I thought when you got married you didn't have to, just slept late and fixed your hair.

July 9, 1982 The puppy's Susta, the cat's Sup. Susta's jealous because Sup jumps on the couch, and she can't.

Bimmie'll have to make pills for Susta. She hides from his needle. She'll be small. That's good, Bimmie says.

August 17, 1982 He just married me to cook! Every night he's in his laboratory. I'm always in this stupid, *ugly* house.

August 18, 1982 Susta won't change for a long time. Bimmie has pills now.

September 1, 1982 School started. Frankie's still stuck on me. He says I'm sexy, that's why Bimmie married me. I said, He married me for my cooking. He laughed.

September 11, 1982 I felt funny again. I stopped by Momma's. She bets she knows what it is. She knew after ten days.

September 15, 1982 I had to ask the school nurse if it was that. She said, Yes, two weeks. I hope she's wrong. Babies are work. She said, But the fulfillment. I said, Chang-

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ing soppy diapers is what you call fulfillment?

It doesn't show. Frankie winked at me.

September 17, 1982 The cat climbed those lace curtains Bimmie's mother gave us. Bimmie said it was my job to watch him. I said, That's a stupid way to spend my life. He said, I didn't marry you to have you sit around and do nothing.

Susta watched Sup and whined. She wants to be a cat.

September 27, 1982 Bimmie read my diary. He said there wasn't a June 31. He says to tell more about his work. It won't make money if he's not in it.

I told him about the baby. He said, Whoopee! He got some obstetrics books.

October 5, 1982 Bimmie expects the baby to kick already. I'm glad it doesn't! He made the puppy's pills tonight.

October 7, 1982 I let them outside. The smell in the house turns my stomach. I'm afraid to take the pills Bimmie made me.

October 9, 1982 I let them out again. There's a black dog next door with a long nose, ears like rosebuds and white feet. Susta was scared. Sup hissed.

October 25, 1982 Bimmie's so nice. He took me to a tridiversion. He hates them. He said, They're for the cloddy-minded masses. I said, Well, what are we?

I want a tridiversion wall. Bimmie says, No. We had a fight.

October 30, 1982 I took a pill Bimmie made. I felt good.

I let them out. It beats cleaning up. Susta played with that dog.

November 7, 1982 I went to Dr. Brantly. He hypnotized me. I don't remember it.

December 13, 1982 Susta's leaving spots. I thought, She's hurt. Bimmie explained and said, Don't let her out. He wants to wait till next time to have puppies. He said, The treatment must take full effect first. He explained but I didn't understand.

January 5, 1983 I'm out of school. It's boring. Momma says I'm too young to settle down. She's crazy. I'm sixteen.

January 11, 1983 Bimmie's reading more obstetrics books. Hypnotism too. He tried to hypnotize me, but I went to sleep.

January 14, 1983 I wish Momma would stop. She said, Where're you going to put a baby, with only one bedroom. She cried and called

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me Baby. Gosh! She said, You shouldn't have cats around babies, you'll have to give him away.

Bimmie heard, from the bedroom. He came out. He said, I am conducting an important scientific experiment with the cat and dog. I would as soon give away the baby. Momma got white under her plasti-skin. She said, Bimmie, you're a monster for experimenting on dumb animals. And for rejecting your own child.

Then Sup climbed the curtains Momma gave us. She shrieked, You're ungrateful! and huffed out.

She came back later, asking us to forgive her. She said she wanted to help, since we're both still children. Well!

I do wonder where we'll put the baby. Maybe on the couch.

February 17, 1983 I had to tell Bimmie I was letting them out. Sup fought with the dog next door. Bimmie got mad. He told me, They must have a controlled environment. I said, It's hard for me to bend over to clean up. Finally he said he'd clean up and wasn't it funny Sup and that dog knew they were rivals.

I didn't know myself.

March 17, 1983 I saw Dr. Brantly today. He says I'm fine. I tried to remember him putting me in the trance, but I couldn't.

April 19, 1983 Saw Dr. Brantly. Sup pulled the curtains down. Susta isn't jealous any more, she's playing with a string.

May 9, 1983 I'm writing this next day. Last night I had this sharp pain. I said, Bimmie, call Dr. Brantly. I remember him looking at me funny. That's all I remember until I woke up in the hospital. Bimmie was sitting beside me, looking proud. I asked him, What's happened? He grinned. We have a nine-pound son, he said. I named him after the man who delivered him. I said, Did I faint? That wasn't the way it was explained, just that Dr. Brantly would put me in a trance. Bimmie was too busy grinning to say, then he had to go to work. The doctor came in. I said, It wasn't bad, I only felt one pain. He frowned. I said, Can I see the baby? He said, Later. He went out too.

I thought I must have cussed.

I didn't understand until the nurse brought the baby. He had a little plastic bracelet that said Bimford Fost, Jr. He was red and squalling. I felt like doing the same, because I knew why Bimmie had been studying those obstetrics books. He has to try everything!

May 21, 1983 I'm seventeen today. Bimmie says to write more. He thinks that's all I have to do.

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The baby sleeps all the time he isn't crying. I like him, only I'm tired of diapers.

Susta gets three pills every day. She plays with them, then eats them. Bimmie said last night, It won't be long until my experiment bears fruit. He said to write that here.

June 3, 1983 Susta tried to climb the curtains.

June 5, 1983 Bimmie wanted to give the baby some pills he made. I said, No. He said, They'll make him smarter, woman. I said, He's enough trouble dumb.

Today was our first anniversary. Bimmie wouldn't buy me anything.

June 9, 1983 We fought about a dryer. After he left I said, For that I'll let your animals out. The dog next door came up. Susta arched her back.

June 21, 1983 I've been putting them out every day.

June 25, 1983 Bimmie says to write every day, his experiment is coming to a head. I can't see anything happening. Susta gets six pills now.

June 27, 1983 The dog's that way again. Bimmie said, At last my experiment shall be carried to completion. Not that I care for fame and riches, no, I care only for the accomplishment of something man has never before achieved. I said he didn't sound natural. He said, Put it down that way, woman.

June 29, 1983 Bimmie wanted to feed the baby. I caught him before he gave him a pill. We fought. He said, Who delivered him? I said, I made him, and pointed to my stomach. I said, I won't have you using him like a guinea pig.

July 4, 1983 Bimmie says tomorrow we'll shut them up in the basement.

July 5, 1983 The funniest thing. Bimmie said, You put them in the basement. Then he left. I thought, I'll just take them out while I hang diapers. But when we went out, three dogs came up. I said, Scat! I couldn't chase them because I had my arms full of diapers, because Bimmie won't buy me a basket. They came closer, edging around. I stomped my feet and yelled. The dog next door came and growled. Then Sup hissed at him. This was the first the other three saw Sup. He hunched up, spitting and intending to chase them off. Only they took out after him instead. He ran off with four dogs after him.

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I couldn't do anything, my arms were full.

July 6, 1983 Bimmie didn't think it was funny. He yelled, What are you, stupid? Didn't you know dogs would come around? Didn't you know dogs chase cats? He took the car and called, Kitty, kitty, all over town. No luck. I said, Get another cat. He said, This one is used to Susta. I said, There'll be another time. He stared at me and said Susta's system would tolerate only so much of the stuff he's been giving her. He can't give her any more after next month. He'll have to wait another year. Then he went looking again.

That was last night. Maybe he'll come home tonight.

July 7, 1983 He hasn't. Bimmie's biting his fingernails. He'd bite harder if he knew what happened today.

I thought Susta was asleep when I went to hang diapers. I had my arms clear full. When I opened the door, Susta shot past me. I yelled at her, but she went flying down the street, and I saw that dog next door take off behind her. I thought first thing, It's Bimmie's fault for not buying a dryer.

I hung the clothes fast. After all, nothing could happen in such a short time. Then I started up the street calling, Here Susta! But the baby was alone, I had to hurry home.

She came back in half an hour. I didn't tell Bimmie yet.

July 8, 1983 I didn't tell him, still. He was mad because he had to pay to get Sup out of the pound. Bimmie salved his ears, they were torn, and put them in the basement. He said, Now!

July 15, 1983 Bimmie says to write every day. It's dull, them in the basement. They come up tomorrow.

July 23, 1983 Susta acts funnier than ever. She rubs my legs when I'm cooking. She keeps wetting her paws and rubbing her face.

August 3, 1983 Today I caught Susta sharpening her claws on the couch. I said, Bimmie, look at the crazy dog, thinks she's a cat. He frowned. He only has one pimple now, he's kind of handsome. I said, Isn't it cute? Bimmie went downstairs. I think he was worried.

August 11, 1983 Susta's getting big. I let her sleep with the baby. Bimmie says, Whoopee! It worked! I'm scared to tell him now.

August 12, 1983 Susta rubs my leg when she's hungry. Then she

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sits and switches her tail for a long time.

August 17, 1983 Susta meowed today. I was fixing dinner. She looked up and said, Meow. It wasn't supposed to be this way. Bimmie's afraid she'll have kittens. That isn't what he's trying to do.

September 5, 1983 Susta wanted to go down in the basement this afternoon. When I called her for supper she came up with her stomach flat. Bimmie and I went down. Susta ducked back in a hole in the wall. There's a sort of little cave. We said, They must be in there. We got a flash, and we could see little black balls. Bimmie couldn't reach them.

Bimmie kept talking about how his experiment is going to revolutionize agriculture.

September 6, 1983 I can hear her meowing to them. We can see them with the flash. We can't tell anything yet.

September 7, 1983 He'll buy a typewriter but not a dryer! He's going to write a book about his experiment. He expects *me* to type it.

September 10, 1983 She still won't bring them out. She purred today, rusty-like. Bimmie says, sometimes, It had to work. Other times he bites his nails.

He gave me ten pages to type. I thought I'd better.

September 13, 1983 I went down to call Susta and I saw them. There were five, wobbling everywhere. They're the cutest fat things. I picked one up, and then I felt sick. He had a long nose and little rosebud ears and white feet. He looked like the dog next door.

All of them do. They're all puppies. Nothing else, just puppies.

I put them in a box and took them upstairs.

Bimmie's working tonight. I'll go to bed before he comes home.

September 14, 1983 He raved all morning and tromped around. I said, Shut up or I'll leave and you'll have to eat capsules. He said, I could eat dog food! Then he wanted to see my diary. I said, No. But he yanked out all the drawers and found it.

I took the baby and went to Momma's.

It was suppertime when I came home. He was on the couch with Sup and Susta and the puppies.

He didn't act mad, just nasty-nice. So you came home, he said. I never realized how limited you were, Listie. Your diary's shown me a lot. Can you at least find homes for the puppies?

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I said, I guess. I put the baby down. He hadn't thrown anything or burned my diary.

He said, Good, then. I've fixed supper.

He had hamburger, frozen pie and hot chocolate. Some of it tasted bad. I didn't say anything.

September 15, 1983 I asked Bimmie, Should I quit my diary? He said, Yes. Then, No, keep on. I asked, was he doing another experiment? He said, Not yet. I said, Bim better not start talking early. He said, You don't think I'd experiment with my own child? I didn't know. He said, Bim might be smart anyway. I said, He might be, he's your son. It was a good compliment.

September 17, 1983 Bimmie wants to learn cooking. He said, You have to work hard, hanging diapers. It will help if I can cook.

I'll teach him hot chocolate first. His fixing tastes *awful.*

October 5, 1983 I have little to report. Bimford, Jr. is flourishing. The puppies are adorable. Susta and Sup tend them jointly.

Bimmie has no new project. He has thrown all his energies into cooking. He does quite well, except for hot chocolate, which still tastes of chemicals.

I never, until yesterday, realized the intellectual and sensual joy to be derived from delving into Greek drama.

November 9, 1983 Bimford, Jr. is six months old today. Since I gave up the last puppy, the house seems barnlike in its emptiness. I mentioned the fact to Bimford.

His glance was speculative. "I have some money saved. Want a tridiversion wall?"

I was horrified. "Whatever for?"

He shrugged. "Maybe you'd like to go to the library. Get something to read."

I considered. "Perhaps I will," I said. "There isn't much for me to do, hang diapers and push buttons. Automation has almost completely eliminated the housewife's traditional chores."

I left Bimford, Jr. with Mother and walked to the library. I asked the librarian to show me about.

"What are you interested in?" she inquired.

"I don't know," I replied. "Do you have any good recent works on chemistry or perhaps nuclear physics?"

She raised her eyebrows but conducted me to the proper shelf. After finding several interesting volumes, I also checked out a volume on cookery for Bimford. His hot chocolate doesn't improve, despite nightly practice.

He tells me he is working on a new project.

— SYDNEY VAN SCYOC

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WHO DARES A BULBUR EAT?

By GORDON R. DICKSON

Illustrated by SCHELLING

Aliens needn't look like men. They can come in any shape, size — or flavor!

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I

"ME!" said Lucy. "At an Ambassadorial Banquet!"

"Don't be like that now," said Tom, pausing in the night shadow of a ten-foot-high alien plant, something in the shape of a bear-trap. He took a last couple of drags from his cigaret and ground it out underfoot, on the footpath of terrazzo tile.

"How should I be?"

"Nonchalant," said Tom. "You do this sort of thing every day. Ho-hum."

"But certainly the Jaktal Ambassador knows you're only a third assistant secretary in the Foreign Office's Department of New Governments — "

"We hope they won't know me at all. Heh-heh."

"You sound nervous, honey."

"I am not nervous."

"Then why are you biting your nails?"

"I am not biting my nails. I never bite my nails. I just thought I had something stuck between my front teeth, that's all. I don't know why you always keep talking about me biting my nails, when you know as well as I do . . . Ah, good evening, Spandul. My card. I am Thomas Whitworth Reasoner, and this is my mate, Lucy Sue Reasoner. Beware the zzatz."

"You are welcome, sorr!" hissed the Spandul, which was about three feet high, black, lean as a toothpick, and had a mouth full of vicious looking needle-sharp teeth. It stood just within the golden glow of the light from the high arched doorway to the Jaktal Embassy in Washington. Its large eyes glittered at Lucy. "Welcome alssso, Lady. Enter please. Here you will be safe from zzatz."

It took their cloaks and they proceeded on through the entrance into a long, high-ceilinged hall, already well-filled with humans and aliens of all varieties, all in evening dress.

"What's 'zzatz'?" muttered Lucy in Tom's ear.

"Means 'a most unfortunate fate'," muttered Tom back. "Ah, good evening, Monsieur Pourtoit," he said in French, "I don't believe you've met my wife." And he introduced Lucy to a tall thin gentleman with a sad face and a broad red ribbon crossing his white dress shirt under a dinner jacket. The gentleman acknowledged the introduction gracefully.

"Elle est charmante," he said, bowing to Lucy.

"Why, *thank* you, Mr. Ambassador!" said Lucy. "I can see —"

"However if you'll excuse us," said Tom, catching Lucy by the hand, "we must be going."

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"Of course," said M. Pourloit. Tom towed Lucy off.

"Well, all I was going to say was —" whispered Lucy.

"Ah, Brakt Kul Djok! May I present my wife, Mrs. Lucy Sue Reasoner?"

"Well, well, honored I am positive!" boomed a large alien, looking something like a walrus with a stocking cap on. "A fine young lady, I can see at a glance, hey, boy?" The walrus-sized elbow joggled Tom almost off his feet. "See you coming up in the world, hey? Hey? Wonder what type entertainment and food this Jaktal puts out, hah? Never tell about these new alien types, hey, ho?"

TOM laughed heartily and they moved on, Tom introducing Lucy every few feet to some new human or alien of the diplomatic circle in Washington. Finally they found themselves at the punchbowl, and were able to fill a couple of glasses and find a small alcove out of the crowd.

"What I don't understand," said Lucy, "is how they can have a banquet for so many different kinds of people and aliens. I should think —"

"Well, they do have a number of different foods for those who can't eat anything but their own special diet. And of course it's necessary to stay clear of what might offend anyone," said Tom, after a large swallow of the punch. "But you'd be surprised how much in common tastes are among different intelligent, animal life forms. It's all flesh and plant food, in every case."

"But don't some of them taste . . .?" said Lucy.

"Some, of course," said Tom. "But a lot of alien foods are quite tasty. I've liked all sorts of diverse items I've run into."

"Oh!" said Lucy.

"What's wrong?"

"What do you think's in this punch?" said Lucy, examining her glass with suspicion.

"Fruit juice and alcohol. Now," said Tom, "let's just run over the schedule for the evening. First, we'll be having entertainment."

"Oh, Tom, wait a minute," said Lucy, interrupting. "Listen. How sad!"

"What?" he said — and then he heard it. A voice, around the corner from their alcove and through an archway leading back, was pouring out a thin, sad thread of song. He stiffened suddenly. "Wait a minute. I'll see."

He got up and went around the corner. Through the archway he could see a farther doorway from which light was showing. He went forward and looked into the lighted room beyond. At this moment Lucy bumped into him from behind.

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"I TOLD you to wait for me!" he whispered angrily at her.

"You did not. You said, 'wait a minute'. Anyway," said Lucy, "there's nothing here but that great big jelly mold on the table." And she pointed to an enormous three-tiered mass of what seemed to be pink, green and yellow gelatine on a silver box set on a white tablecloth. The tablecloth was on a table which was the only furniture in the room.

"You know what I meant!" said Tom. "And somebody was singing here."

"It was I," said the jelly mold in sweet and flawless tones of English.

Lucy stared at it. Tom was the first to recover.

"May I present my wife?" he said. "Mrs. Lucy Sue Reasoner. I am James Whitworth Reasoner, Third Assistant Secretary in the Foreign Office Earth Department of New Governments."

"I'm awfully pleased to meet you," said the jelly mold. "I am Kotnick, a Bulbur."

"Was it a Bulbur song you were singing?" asked Lucy.

"Alas," said Kotnick, "it is a Jaktal song. A little thing I composed myself but sung, of course, in Jaktal — though unfortunately with a heavy Bulbur accent."

"But you sing so beautifully!" said Lucy. "What would it sound like if you sang it in Bulbur?"

"Alas," said Kotnick, "there is no Bulbur to sing it in. There is only Jaktal."

Lucy looked bewildered.

"You don't understand," Tom said to her. "There are a number of intelligent races on the Jaktal planets. But the Jaktal are the ruling ones. The language and everything takes its name from the rulers."

"Indeed, yes," said the Bulbur. "And properly so."

"I knew about Spanduls, and Gloks, and Naffings," said Tom, looking at it. "But we haven't heard much about you Bulburs compared to the rest of the inferior races of the Jaktal."

The Bulbur turned pink all over.

"Pardon my immodesty," it said, "but I have come especially for the occasion."

"Ah?" said Tom. He stepped closer to the Bulbur and lowered his voice. "Perhaps, then, you can tell me —"

"Did the sorr and lady wisssh somesing?" interrupted a sharp, hissing voice. The two humans turned abruptly to see a Spandul like the one that had admitted them to the embassy. It was standing in the doorway. Beside it was a sort of four-foot worm with fang-like teeth curving down from its upper lip.

"Oh!" said Tom. "No. Nothing.

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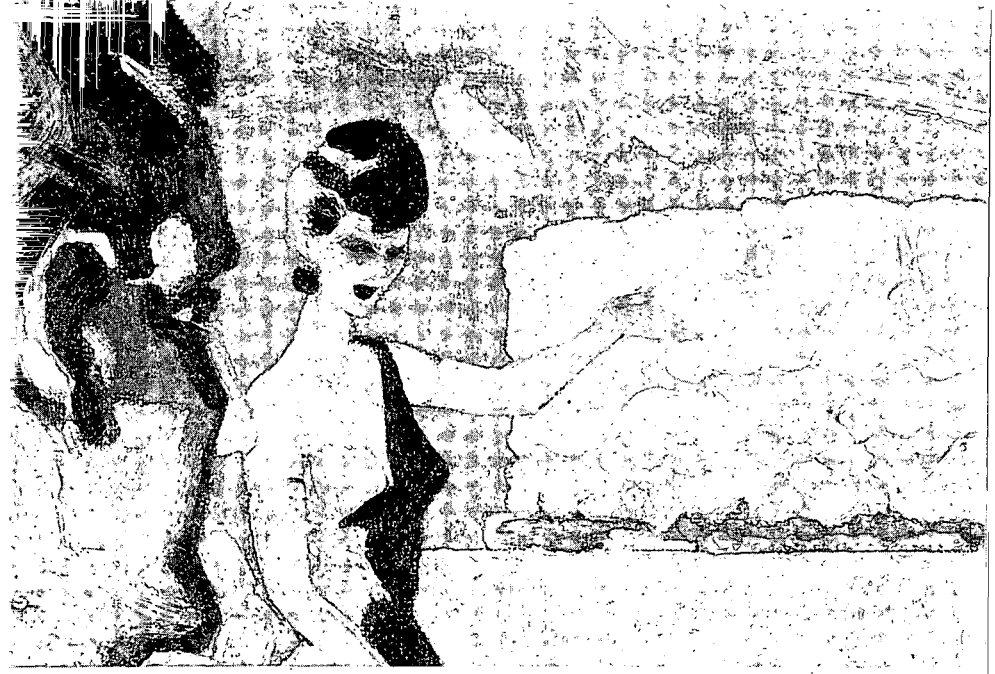

Nothing at all. We heard this Bulbur singing and wandered in to meet it."

"It ssshould not sssing!" hissed the Spandul, looking at the Bulbur, which quivered and went almost colorless.

"WELL, it wasn't really singing. Sort of just humming. Well, we'll have to be getting back to the punch bowl. Glad to have met you, Kotnick." Still talking, Tom herded Lucy before him past the Spandul and the worm-like being and out into the shadowy area giving on the hall. The worm-like being slithered past them into the room and the Spandul fell in beside the humans, its needly teeth glittering at them.

"Guestsss," it hissed, "will find it mossst comfortable in main hall area."

"I imagine you're right," said Tom. "We'll trot on back. Nice of you to show us the way. See you later, then. May there be no zzatz beneath this roof tonight."

"There will *be* no zzatz beneasss ssis roof tonight," replied the Spandul, fixing them with its glittering eyes as they moved out into the hall.

"Well," said Tom. "How about another glass of punch, Lucy?"

"I should say not," said Lucy. She took hold of his sleeve and led him back around to the pri-

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vacy of their alcove. "Now, suppose you tell me what's going on."

"Going on?" said Tom.

"Yes, going on," said Lucy. "And you might as well tell me now because I'm going to keep after you until you do tell me. I thought we were just going to a banquet. You didn't give me any notion that it was something undercover or something like that. Now I want you to tell me right now — " she broke off. "What are you making faces like that for?"

Tom, besides making faces, was scribbling on a piece of paper torn from his checkpocket. He passed it to her.

Will you keep quiet? the paper read. *The walls have ears. I can't tell you. It's top secret.*

"Oh!" gasped Lucy. Tom took the paper from her hands and held it up to her lips.

"Eat it!" he whispered.

"I certainly will not!" whispered back Lucy, revolted.

"Then I'll have to." said Tom. He took it, and he did.

"Oh!" said Lucy, impressed. Tom was looking at her in an unusual way. She shrank back a little.

"Shall we dance?" said Tom.

"D-dance?"

His eyebrows wigwagged angrily at her.

"Oh, *dance!*" she said. "Of course!"

II

TOM led her out across the hall and into a sort of garden area where a band was playing. When they were well out into the middle of the dance floor, he put his lips close to her ear and murmured into it.

"You might be able to help after all."

"Yes?" whispered Lucy.

"The Office Upstairs," whispered Tom, "is very concerned about this Jaktal race. Six months ago, we didn't even know they existed. Now we suddenly discover they have a spatial empire at least as large as ours. Not only that, but the Jaktal themselves — I mean the dominant race — seem to have a conqueror psychology, judging by their expansion and the intelligent races like the Spanduls, Naffings, and Gloks."

"Was that one of them — that worm-like thing with the fangs?" Lucy asked.

"A Naffing," said Tom. "They are not much more intelligent than an adult chimp. But dangerous. But to get back to the important part of the business, recent information seems to indicate that even with our alien allies, we'd be at the mercy of the Jaktal empire, if they decided to move against us right now."

"Would they?" Lucy shivered.

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"We don't know. That's it. Their ambassador talks peaceful relations; but we can't make this match up with the character he and his subservient races show. You'll see what I mean when you get a look at Bu Hjark, the Ambassador."

"But what's it all got to do with us — with you?"

"Well, you remember how they thought we did a good job with that Oprinkian*? Well, there's a new addition to the Embassy here. That Bulbur we just saw. He — or it, we don't even know that much yet — seems entirely different from the rest of the crew here. So what does it mean? What's his place in the organization? What does his showing up here mean in terms of the Jaktal attitude toward us and our alien allies?"

"I see what you mean," whispered Lucy. *"Ouch!"*

"What happened?"

"You just stepped on my toe."

"Oh. Sorry."

"It's all right. Go on."

"IT'S hard to concentrate on two things at once. As I was saying, the Office Upstairs thought I might be able to get the information where somebody better known in our diplomatic corps might fail. Easier for me to be inconspicuous. Of course, that's why I brought you along, too."

"Well, I like that!"

"I'm sorry. But that's the way diplomacy is. Now, we've had one stroke of luck already. We've found out where the Bulbur is, and we know he's off without a crowd around him. The next step is up to me. I have to have a chance to talk to him alone."

"Oh, I see."

"Yes," said Tom, "and I think that's where you can help."

"Oh, good."

"Do you think you can get that Spandul out of the way while I have a talk with the Bulbur? I can gas the Naffing. It can't talk and report what's been done to it. But the Spandul could, if I gassed him."

"Well," said Lucy, biting her lower lip, "I don't know. It isn't as if he was a man, or something. What'll I do?"

"He has to be polite to you — especially if you can get him out where people can see him. You'll think of something."

"I hope," said Lucy.

"Sure you will. Let's go," Tom started to lead the way off the dance floor and suddenly noticed that she was limping. "Ohmigosh, I didn't realize I'd stepped on you that hard!"

"It's all right," said Lucy,

*REX AND MR. REJILLA, Galaxy, January 1958

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bravely. "Maybe I can use it as an excuse to make him stay with me."

"That's an idea," said Tom. They were off the dance floor now and he lowered his voice. "I'll tell him I want him to take care of you while I go for a doctor to make your foot more comfortable. Then, when I leave you with him, you get him away from the entrance there any way you can."

He broke off suddenly. A fanfare of something like trumpets had just silenced all the talk in the room. The crowd was splitting apart down the middle, leaving the center of the floor clear. Luckily, Tom and Lucy were already on the side of the room they wished to reach.

"I wonder what's happening?" said Lucy. "Oh, dear. I wish we had Rex with us."

"Rex!" said Tom. "What good would it do to have that moose of a dog along?"

"He could keep us in touch with each other."

"How? Just because we picked up enough telepathic sense from that Oprinkian to understand Rex doesn't mean he'd be any use to us now. What I wish is that we'd been able to go one step further and understand people's thoughts. Even each other's thoughts. That's what we need now."

"IF Rex was with you and trouble came, he'd start broadcasting excited thoughts, and then I'd know you were in trouble."

"What good would that do? You couldn't do anything about it. No, believe me, Rex would be just what we needed to bollix things up," said Tom. "Besides I'm happy to have a rest from those inane canine thoughts of his. *'Good Tom,' 'Good Lucy,' 'play ball?'* — all day long."

Tom broke off suddenly. The trumpets had sounded again, a wild, violent shout of metal throats. Now, bounding down through the open lane in the middle they could see an alien fully eight feet tall, approaching and bellowing greetings to people in the crowd.

"It's him," said Tom. "Him, the Jaktal Ambassador, Bu Hjark. Just look at him!"

Bu Hjark was a huge lizard-like alien, with a heavy, powerful tail. Elbows out, huge hands half-clenched, he danced down the open space like a boxer warming up in the ring. Brilliant ribbons and medals covered his silver tunic and shorts. Into a gem-studded belt was fastened a heavy, curve-bladed sword.

"Ho! Ho! Welcome! Welcome!" he roared. "Great pleasure to have you all here! Great pleasure. Greetings, Brakt Dul Jokt.

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Evening, Mr. Vice-President! Great evening, isn't it? Find yourself seats, respected entities, and let me show you how the Jaktal entertain."

"What does he need a sword for?" whispered Lucy, staring. "With those teeth and nails?"

"And that tail," said Tom. "Just part of his costume, no doubt. Wait until the entertainment starts. Then we can slip off while everybody's watching."

"Positions, everybody!" shouted Bu Hjark, and added something in Jaktal. A crowd of ape-like beings in full metal armor trotted in and formed a protective wall in front of the audience. Laughing hugely, Bu Hjark took off his sword-belt and tossed it to one of these.

"Gloks," explained Tom in answer to Lucy's inquiring gaze, nodding at the beings in armor. "A little brighter than the Naffings, not so bright as the Spanduls. Sort of high-grade morons. But extremely strong for their size."

"First," Bu Hjark was crying, "let in the Bashtash!"

THERE was a moment's pause, then a gasp from the far end of the room, drowned out by a sudden bestial bellow. Something the general shape of a rhinoceros but not so large, charged down the aisle full tilt at Bu Hark, who met it with flailing hands and tail, and a deep-chested shout. Amid roarings and snarlings, they rolled on the floor together.

"I can't look," said Lucy, hiding her eyes.

"It's all right, it's all over," said Tom, a few moments later. "He wrung its neck. See, some Gloks are carrying it off."

"Now, for the armed Wlackins!" shouted Bu Hjark. And a moment later, a herd of five small, centaur-like creatures, clutching sharpened stakes, galloped down upon Bu Hjark, who joined battle with them gleefully.

"Let's get going," whispered Tom.

"Yes, let's," said Lucy with a shudder. They threaded their way through the staring crowd to the shadowy corner which led back to the room where they had discovered the Bulbur.

"Limp more!" said Tom. He guided her toward the lighted doorway. "Hey! Spandul?"

The Spandul they had seen earlier emerged from the room. Its eyes glittered suspiciously upon them.

"What iss the masser?" it hissed. "Guests will be more comfortable in main hall."

"My mate has hurt herself. I insist you give me a hand here," said Tom. "I need help."

"Help?"

"I must get a doctor. Right

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now!" said Tom. "You understand? Find her a chair. Look after her while I find a doctor!"

"Doctor?" hissed the Spandul. It glanced back into the room behind it, and then out again at Tom and Lucy.

"A chair," moaned Lucy, clinging to Tom.

"What're you waiting for?" snapped Tom. "Is this the way you do things here at the embassy? I'll speak to the Ambassador himself about this!"

"Yesss, yesss. I help," said the Spandul, gliding forward. It took hold of the arm of Lucy which Tom was not holding. "Chair. Thisss way."

"Good. Stay with her," said Tom. "I'll go after a doctor."

He turned and plunged back into the crowd. As soon as he was out of sight, however, he stopped, waited for a moment and then slowly began to work his way back.

III

WHEN he arrived once more at the shadowy entrance, it was empty. He slipped quickly back to the doorway, taking what appeared to be an lifetime fountain pen from his pocket as he approached the doorway. Holding it, he peered inside. The Naffing, curled up in a corner, reared up at the sight of him.

He pointed the pen at it and pressed the clip. There was an almost inaudible pop. The Naffing wavered a minute and then sank down to lie still on the floor.

"What is it?" fluted the jelly on the table, paling to near transparency. "Have you come to kill me?"

"No," said Tom. He glanced behind him and saw the entrance still deserted, the crowd still occupied with the combat going on. He slipped into the room. "I want to talk to you."

"Take my worthless life, then," keened the jelly. "I have nothing worth talking about.

"Yes, you have," said Tom. "You can tell me about yourself."

"Myself?" A little color began to flow back into the Bulbur. "Ah, I see. It is not me. It is the high role I have been chosen to play that makes me an object of interest to you."

"Oh? Oh yes, that of course," said Tom. "Let me hear you describe it in your own words."

The Bulbur turned pink.

"I am not worthy," it murmured.

"Tell me," said Tom. The Bulbur turned flame-colored.

"I am . . ." it began and then its voice almost failed it, "the . . . most important item . . ." At that its voice did fail it.

"Go on," said Tom, drawing close to it.

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"I cannot. The emotion involved is too strong."

The Bulbur had deepened its red color until it was almost black. Its voice seemed strangled and unnatural. Tom cast another glance at the doorway.

"All right," he said. "Let's talk about things you can talk about for a moment. Tell me about yourself—aside from what you're supposed to do here."

"But I am nothing," sang the Bulbur, paling relievedly. "I am a mere blob. A shameful blob."

"Shameful?" said Tom.

"Oh, yes," said the Bulbur, earnestly. "A shameful quiver of emotions. A useless creature, possessing only a voice and the power of putting forth weak pseudopods to get about. A pusillanimous peace-worshipper in a universe at war."

"Peace?" Tom stiffened. "Did you say *peace*-worshipper?"

"Oh, yes. Yes," fluted the Bulbur. "It is the main cause of my shame. Ah, if only the worlds of the universe were oriented to my desires!" Its voice sank, and took on a note of sad reasonableness, not untouched with humor. "But obviously, if it had been meant to be that way, all life forms would be cast in the shape of Bulburs—and this, manifestly, is not the case."

"Look," said Tom with another glance out the doorway, to see that the way was still clear, "I'm afraid I don't understand you. What do you mean, *peace*-worshipper?"

"If you will permit me," said the Bulbur humbly. "I might sing you a little melody?"

"Well, if it'll help," said Tom. "Go ahead."

THE Bulbur turned a pale, happy pink. A thread of melody began to pour forth from it. Up until now, Tom had been too concerned to figure out how a three-layer aspic, even one of large size, could manage to talk and sing. But now, looking closer, he perceived, palely moving and pulsating within the body of the Bulbur, almost transparent organs and parts—heart, lungs, and throat among others, with a clear channel leading to a small mouth in the very top of the being. He was also suddenly aware of pale, almost transparent eyes ringing the upper tier like decorations on a wedding cake in jelly form.

But almost as soon as he had seen this, he began to forget all about it. The melody he was listening to began to pass beyond mere sound, began to pass beyond mere music. It moved completely inside him and became a heart-twisting voice speaking of peace, beyond any other voice that could possibly speak in opposition. He felt himself swept

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away. It was only with a sudden, convulsive effort that he broke loose from the hold of that voice upon him.

"Wait! Hold it!" he gasped. "I get it. I understand."

The Bulbur broke off suddenly, with a sound very much like a sob.

"Excuse me," it whispered. "It's shameful, I know, but I was carried away."

"Well, it's not shameful, exactly," said Tom, clearing his throat. "I mean — there's more to life than that, of course. But I don't see why you think you have to be ashamed of it."

"Because," said the Bulbur, going a sad, translucent blue, "it is my mark—the mark of my difference from all the rest of you. I cannot stand to force my opinion on anyone else. I have no virtues. It is quite right that I should suffer."

"Suffer?"

"Ah, indeed — suffer. Oh," said the Bulbur, pinkening again, "it's a great honor, I know. I should be rejoicing. But I'm a failure at rejoicing, too." And now it did sob, quite distinctly.

"Wait a minute, now," said Tom. "You seem to have things all twisted up. What gives you the idea nobody but you prefers peace to fighting?"

The Bulbur turned completely transparent. "You mean you also find peace to be a pleasant and desirable thing?"

"Of course," said Tom.

"Oh — you poor creature," breathed the Bulbur. "How you must suffer."

"Suffer? Certainly not!" said Tom. "We like it peaceful. We keep it peaceful."

"You *keep* it peaceful?"

"Well—most of the time," said Tom, a little guiltily.

"But what do you do with such as the Jaktals, the Spanduls, the Gloks and the Naffings?"

"We — well, we stop them," said Tom. "By force, if necessary."

"But force? Isn't that coercion?" said the Bulbur, turning pink, chartreuse and mauve in that order. "Isn't that fighting fire with fire?"

"Why not? said Tom.

THE Bulbur went slowly, completely transparent again.

"Oh, I couldn't!" it said at last.

"Certainly. That singing of yours is a strong argument. I'd think you'd use it."

"Oh, no," said the Bulbur. "What if I was successful? That would make me a dominator of the Jaktals—and the Spanduls."

"To say nothing," said Tom, "of the Gloks, Naffings and so forth." He stopped suddenly, wondering what had just alarmed him. Then he noticed

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that the sound of battle from the main hall had suddenly ceased. "Why shouldn't you have things peaceful if you want them?"

"Why, it's not natural," said the Bulbur. "Look at the matter logically. If beings had been intended to live in peace — "

"Good-by!" interrupted Tom, sprinting out the door. He had just noticed the crowd stirring and opening in the direction of the shadowy entrance and this room. He made it to the fringes of the crowd in the main hall just as a lane parted through them and a platoon of Gloks appeared, marching toward the room. Tom slipped down the open space behind them to the edge of the open area in the center of the floor. A table had just been set up in the middle of the floor. A Naffing, operating a sort of vacuum cleaner, was busy cleaning up a few last spots of pale blood. Bu Hjark, wearing a few neat bandages, his sword replaced, was standing by the table directing the Naffing. Tom gained a ringside position, and all but bumped into Lucy, limping around the ring in the opposite direction.

"That Spandul finally insisted on going to get a doctor, himself. I came to warn you to get out," she said. "What happened?"

Before Tom could answer, there was a fanfare of trumpets. The crowd opened up again alongside them and the platoon of Gloks, now bearing the Bulbur on its silver stand, marched out to the table and set stand and Bulbur up in the middle of it. Bu Hjark raised his hand for silence and barked at the Naffing with the vacuum cleaner, which scurried off.

"Respected Entities!" boomed Bu Hjark. "I now bring you the climax to the evening's entertainment and the commencement of the banquet itself. I have no doubt, respected Entities, that you have on occasion tasted rare and fine dishes. However, tonight I mean to provide you not merely with the finest-tasting food you have ever encountered — a food which all beings who have yet tried it rate better than any other thing they have tasted — but with certain preliminaries and appetizers. After which I shall, with my own hand, prepare and serve the dish to you."

He drew his sword and stepped a little aside from the table.

"And now," he said to the Bulbur. "Commence!"

"R-respected Entities," the Bulbur began with a slight quaver. It turned remarkably transparent, then washed back to blue again. "It is a great honor, I assure you, to be the appetizer to your banquet tonight. We Bulburs are a worthless lot, fit only

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for pleasing the worthwhile palates of our betters. It is our one pride and pleasure, to know that you find us good to—" the Bulbur swallowed audibly and then took up its speech a little more rapidly as Bu Hjark scowled at it — "eat. I cannot express the intense enjoyment—" it said rapidly "—that it gives me to be here tonight, awaiting—my supreme fulfillment as appetizer to the banquet you will shortly be having. To ensure your unalloyed enjoyment of me, I will now," it said, speeding up even more under Bu Hjark's steely, lizard-like eye, "sing you a mouth-watering song to increase your appreciation of my truly unique flavor." It broke off and visibly took a deep breath, turned pale, but came steadily back to a solid blue color.

"Tom!" Lucy clutched Tom's elbow with fingers that dug in. "It can't mean we're going to *eat* it? Tom, do something!"

"What?" said Tom as a small beginning thread of golden melody began to emerge, growing in volume as it continued, from the mouth of the Bulbur.

"I don't know. But stop it!"

DESPERATELY, Tom looked around him for inspiration. He thought of how he had almost begun to convince the Bulbur that its attitudes were not unique in the universe. He thought of how effective the Bulbur's gift of song had proved in the room when the Bulbur sang to him. *What we need is another Bulbur to sing it into resisting the Jaktal,* he thought — and, with that, inspiration came to him. He opened his mouth and, in his best bathroom baritone, burst into song:

"*Allons, enfants de la patrie—*" he sang.

Almost with the first word, Lucy chimed in with him. Her untrained but clear soprano picked up the second line.

"*— Le jour de gloire* — Sing!" she cried to Monsieur Pourtoit, who was standing across the open space from them. He bowed to her gravely. He looked a little puzzled, but after all he was a Frenchman. He opened his mouth and joined a resonant, trained voice to her tones and Tom's.

"What is this?" roared Bu Hjark, spinning around to face Tom. His lizard face was agape, showing great dog teeth. He lifted the sword ominously in his hand. Tom swallowed, but continued to sing.

The *Marseillaise,* the anthem of France, was beginning to sound its battle cry against tyranny from other confused but cooperative lips. The sword swung up. The Gloks turned as

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one man toward Tom. Suddenly a clear, pure note, two octaves above high F, trilled through all the sound of the room, striking them motionless. The whole room turned toward the table.

THE fine, thrilling note was proceeding from the Bulbur. It had stretched upward until it was almost twice its original height. From what well of knowledge it had picked up the necessary information Tom was never to discover, but it had changed color. Its lowest tier was now red, its second tier blue, its top tier white. As they all stood, as if attention, it broke magnificently into the French anthem to liberty:

"Against us long, a tyranny," it sang in wild, masterful accents. *"A bloody sword has waved on high!"*

It was pitching its notes directly at Bu Hjark. Those assembled saw the full power of the Bul-

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bur's melody-born emotional might driving through the savage ego of the Jaktal like a metal blade through the tender body of a Bulbur. Now it caught the whole assemblage up in its song. Spellbound, a chorus of diplomatic and government personnel harking from old Sol to the furthest of the Pleiades, roared to the tune of the Marseillaise:

Too long have you kept us subject,
With your Spanduls, your Naffings and your Gloks!
Why shouldn't peace be sweet?
Who dares a Bulbur eat?
Have done! Have done!
Let there be an end!
It's be-autiful PEACE —
From this hour on, my friend!

And, as the last great chord of voices crashed into silence, the huge figure of the Jaktal Ambassador could be seen to shiver

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through all its length and, leaning more and more at an angle with eyes glazed, topple at last to thunder upon the floor like some mighty ruined tower. And the voices of the Spanduls and Gloks present rose in one great wail, crying, "Zzatz! Zzatz! Zzatz . . ."

When their cries at last died away into silence, the Bulbur on the table could be seen to have taken on an all-over shade of perky pink.

"Jaktals," it mentioned, in mild but audible tones as it leaned above the fallen Bu Hjark, "are also supposed to be very good eating."

"AND that remark," said Tom the evening of the next day, after he had finished work, waded through the softball game in the street before their house, patted Rex, the Great Dane, and kissed Lucy, "will undoubtedly go down in the history books as the harshest statement ever made by an adult Bulbur."

"But what's going to happen to the Bulburs now?" asked Lucy, as she gave Tom a Martini and Rex a bowl of Scotch and milk.

"Well, this one told us his race doesn't want anything to do with running the Jaktal empire. He turned the authority over to us humans. All other Bulburs, he said, would ratify that move, if they were contacted by us — if for no other reason than that they wouldn't want to hurt his feelings by disagreeing with him."

"They must be so sensitive!" said Lucy.

"Sensitive," said Tom, taking a glum sip from his Martini, "but shrewd. The Bulbur knew very well he was turning the authority over to people who'd regard it as a sacred trust. 'Greater love hath no being than to take on authority as a duty rather than a privilege,' he said."

"You must admit it was quite a compliment," said Lucy.

"Yeah," said Tom, gloomily. "We're in for one hell of an expansion. They're going to make me a First Assistant Secretary with a full department under me. Twice the work—and a ten per cent raise in pay."

"But imagine," said Lucy radiantly. "Me! The wife of a First Assistant Foreign Secretary!"

Tom sighed heavily. Rex licked his hand. In the pause in the conversation the yells from the softball game outside penetrated through the living-room walls, in spite of their being set on full sound-block. It sounded to Tom a little like Glok and Spandul voices in the distance, faintly and forebodingly crying "Zzatz! Zzatz!"

— GORDON R. DICKSON

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GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

THE DAY following Col. Glenn's historic round and round trip, a prominent official called attention to the problem that he felt loomed largest . . . if not most immediately urgent. It is becoming obvious even to officialdom that we may not be alone — out there — and that raises the aforementioned problem: Communication.

As we in SF are well aware, the problem is enormous. Innumerable author-hours have been devoted to it. We have trouble communicating with fellow products of our own cultural environment, and present experience with electronic language translators has demonstrated how tricky translating thoroughly known languages can be. Explorers throughout the centuries have literally wound up in the soup through failure to recognize or comprehend unfamiliar customs.

How, then, can we expect to tackle completely alien concepts? A good question, to which many people wish we had a good answer.

Unfortunately, we have no in-

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digenous, non-human, civilized races to practice on. However, we may have a good substitute much closer at hand than we suspect.

MAN AND DOLPHIN by John C. Lilley, M.D. Doubleday & Co., Inc.

One of the most thoroughly overworked words in the reviewer's vocabulary, the adjective "fascinating," must be pressed into service to describe the subject matter of this book.

Dr. Lilly opens with these words: "Within the next decade or two the human species will establish communication with another species: nonhuman, alien, possibly extraterrestrial, more probably marine, but definitely intelligent, perhaps even intellectual. If no one among us pursues the matter before inter-species communication is forced upon Homo Sapiens by an alien species, this book will have failed in its purpose."

Provocative introduction, yes? Lilly himself is fully engaged in the research that he has so urgently recommended. It is from that research that his book has taken shape.

It is a fact that Man is not supreme in brain size. Elephants and whales have brains four to six times as big as ours. However, Lilly has ruled out experimentation with these species because of the great disparity in strength. (We are far too vulnerable.) There is one species, however, that owns a brain comparable in size to ours and possesses the ability to vocalize. Neither is it too difficult to manage. The common, bottle-nosed dolphin of Marineland fame fills the bill.

Says Lilly:

"There are many obstacles to mutual understanding. They have no written records and make no artifacts. They have no hands and build nothing. They can swim at 20 knots and in a few days cover thousands of sea miles in search for food or more desirable water temperatures. They have no need for clothing or shelter. Because they do not have to resist gravity, they do not need to sleep . . .

"Dolphins are socially, mutually interdependent. A baby is not weaned for 18 to 21 months. During this period, he is apparently taught many things by the mother on a purely experiential and possibly vocal basis . . . dolphins help one another in distress. Sometimes complex and concerted action is taken after complex vocalization."

Libby, finding that dolphins can mimic human sounds, is attempting to teach them our language. One dolphin experimented

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with *him* to determine our range of audibility. (Ours ranges from 0-20 kc, theirs from 0-200 kc.)

Despite his obvious compassion and concern, all six of his first test subjects died.

Lilly is pioneering in virgin territory. He has to invent experimental procedures as he progresses and failures must outnumber successes. However, as any SFeer can tell him, there is a most uncomfortable parallel between his investigation and the plot of many terror-provoking yarns. The theme, humans as experimental subjects of an alien species, has created acres of gooseflesh. Despite Dr. Lilly's obvious solicitude, the role of the intelligent dolphins evokes empathy, sympathy and pity.

Lilly concludes:

"Even if we are successful, we shall still not be fully prepared to encounter intelligent life forms not of this earth. At most we shall have graduated from the kindergarten of inter-species communication."

THE LONG AFTERNOON OF EARTH by Brian Aldiss. Signet Books

The dolphin figures prominently in Aldiss's all-stops-removed fantasy of a far future and a non-revolving earth. Mankind has survived also, as a green-skinned, tree-dwelling, two-foot high creature totally intent on mere survival in a world in which the vegetable has almost totally supplanted the animal, whether walker, crawler, flyer, burrower or predator. It has even produced keen intelligence in the form of a fungus-like, symbiotic morel.

Aldiss's completely engrossing yarn is far too involved to excerpt, but the problem of interspecies communication is ignored: All his intelligences speak colloquial English. Despite this, and occasional cuteness, Aldiss's book is a *tour-de-force* guaranteed to startle the most blase SF buff.

Rating: ****½

WHEN THEY COME FROM SPACE by Mark Clifton. Doubleday & Co.

Clifton envisions a normal bureaucratic snafu summoning the wrong Ralph Kennedy, Mr. instead of Dr., to Washington to serve as Staff Psychologist of the Dept. of Extraterrestrial Life Research, Space Navy, specializing in the Adaptation of Extraterrestrial Beings to Earth Ecology. Ironically, when ET's *do* land on Earth, *Mr.* Ralph Kennedy turns out to be the one human capable of dealing with them.

Bureaucratic Washington is hard put to survive Clifton's

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vitriolic pen and all mankind rates low on his scale. The Invaders, because they discover our mass mentality to be so low, are convinced that our scientific achievements are the efforts of another race strangely absent. To match our mental level, they materialize as the incarnation of all bad TV Space Cadet programs; broad-shouldered, six-five, modest (Shucks, Ma'm) and with charming Texas drawls. And that takes care of the communication problem.

Rating: ***½

THE FALLING TORCH by Algis Budrys. Pyramid Books

The yarn itself is a crackling good one. The inept, not-too-bright son of Earth's president-in-exile, parachuted with weapons to enable the guerrillas to mount an all-out offensive against the infinitely superior enemy, is plunged beyond his depth.

Rating: ****

OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET by C. S. Lewis. Collier Books

In Lewis's classic, a brilliant, but shady, scientist and his financial partner shanghai a philologist friend to serve as a sacrifice to weird creatures of Malacandra (Mars). (Of course, this description does no justice whatsoever to Lewis's evocative and provocative allegory.)

The author's choice of a philologist hero neatly solves the communication problem by providing the training necessary to achieve a working knowledge of the alien language.

INVADERS FROM THE INFINITE by John W. Campbell, Jr. Gnome Press, Inc.

"Skylark" Smith's only real competitor for the super-science heavyweight title of yore was the esteemed editor of *Analog*. In fact, this 30-year-old story of time-travel, planet smashing and billion-light-year jaunts left Campbell no place to go — except to rebel against this type of yarn with his Don A. Stuart stories that completely altered the course of modern SF.

Campbell brushes off communication by employing thought transference via "Ortolian headset" or by the "Venerian telepathic method." And so much for that subterfuge.

The communication problem may never arise. We may be alone, which is unthinkable, or our nearest neighbors might be too far away to drop in on us. But should they, Dr. Lilly's work will be the foundation on which our attempt at intercourse will rest.

— FLOYD C. GALE

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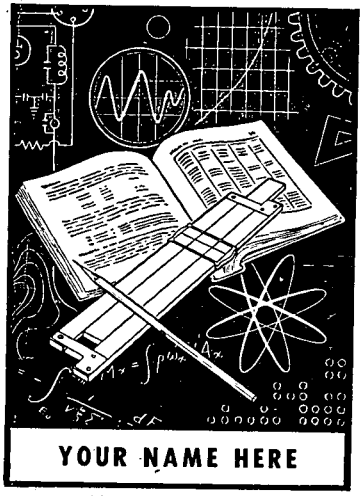

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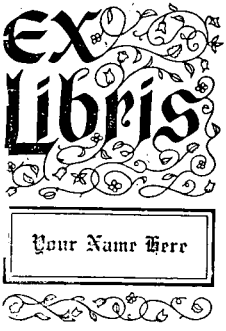

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